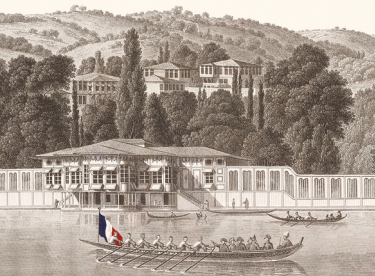


OXFORD

French Revolutionaries in the Ottoman Empire

*Diplomacy, Political Culture, and the Limiting
of Universal Revolution, 1792–1798*

PASCAL FIRGES



FRENCH REVOLUTIONARIES
IN THE OTTOMAN EMPIRE

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To my parents

Acknowledgements

This study was and is a fascinating adventure. It meant bringing together three large fields of historical study: the history of the Ottoman Empire in the later eighteenth century, the history of diplomacy, and the history of the French Revolution. It was a challenge. The book is based on my doctoral dissertation which I submitted at Heidelberg University (Germany) under the title 'On Silent Feet: French Revolutionary Politics and Culture in the Ottoman Empire, 1792–1798'. It would not have come into being without the help and support of many and I fear I will not be able to mention all of them here or to do justice to the personal and intellectual debt I owe to them. First and foremost I would like to express my deepest gratitude to my academic supervisor, Thomas Maissen, who was the ideal *doktorvater* for me. He gave me all the creative leeway I needed, he inspired and enriched my critical historical thinking, and he greatly encouraged me through his unwavering support. The history of this book project began where it ended: in Paris, when I was an exchange student and became interested in the relations between Europe and the world around it before the age of European domination. Kate Fleet was the first one to suggest that I do some research on French revolutionaries in the Ottoman Empire, when I was an exchange student at Cambridge. During this time I met many colleagues and friends who since then have greatly influenced me and who encouraged me to return to Cambridge during my doctorate. In particular, I would like to give my heartfelt thanks to Tobias Graf and Stefan Ihrig for being the great scholars and friends they are.

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chance to meet her in person. Since then, her generous support and her friendly encouragement added to the tremendous intellectual debt I owe to her.

Finally I would like to thank my family, and in particular my wife, for the love, support, and companionship they gave to me in these last years. This book is dedicated to my parents, to whom I owe my creativity, curiosity, and the passion for intellectual activity.

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A Note on Conventions

PLACE NAMES

In general, I use the place names and spellings commonly used in today's English (e.g. Istanbul instead of Constantinople or İstanbul), except for the source quotations, where I have tried to stay close to the original terminology.

DATES

I have converted all dates in this study into Gregorian dates, as I assume that the Gregorian calendar is the most familiar to the majority of readers.

ADDRESSEES OF LETTERS

When citing official correspondence, I have indicated the addressees of letters in the form given in the sources. Austrian and English sources gave the personal names of the addressees (e.g. Austrian Foreign Minister Thugut or British Foreign Minister Grenville); whereas French letters, when sent to the central government, were addressed to institutions (e.g. the Foreign Minister, the Commissaire of External Relations, or the Commission of External Relations).

TRANSLATIONS

All translations are my own, except for those quoted from the cited literature.

TRANSLITERATIONS

For Ottoman Turkish terms, I have used the modern transliterations and, therefore, have omitted all diacritics that are not common in modern Turkish.

Pronunciation of Turkish

The following list is a guide to the Turkish pronunciation of letters that either do not exist in the English alphabet or are pronounced markedly different. It is quoted from Christine Woodhead (ed.), *The Ottoman World* (London, 2012), xvi.

c j as in *jam*

ç ch as in *church*

ğ has little sound of its own; usually lengthens the preceding vowel: e.g. Osmanoğlu = Osman-oh-lu = 'the son(s) of Osman'

s s as in *this* (not as in *these*)

ş sh as in *ship*

a (i) short *a* as in *apple*

(ii) long *a* as in *father* (in Arabic and Persian words)

e e as in *red*

ı (undotted i) as *i* in *cousin*

i i as in *pin*

o o as in *otter*

ö eu as in French *jeu*

u u as in *put*

ü u as in French *tu*

Introduction

Diplomats and Expatriates in the Ottoman Empire during the French Revolution

[T]he happy and astonishing revolution which regenerated France had an effect not only on all foreign governments, but also on all French individuals spread over all countries of the world. This effect was particularly noticeable in the Levant, linked with France through many connections, and where the French, thanks to our capitulations [i.e. special privileges from the Ottoman sultan], enjoy a form of political existence that is independent of the Turkish government.¹

This book is a microstudy on the French Revolution with an unusual geographic focus: it explores the activities of French citizens and government agents in Istanbul and other cities of the Ottoman Empire. These people lived under French laws, but in a cultural environment completely different from that of their compatriots in France. The book will investigate and explain the political and cultural effects of the French Revolution in this different setting. There were two spheres upon which the regime change in France—from *ancien régime* monarchy to revolutionary republic—had a direct impact: French diplomacy and the public life and politics of the French expatriate communities. In both fields, people ventured to put into action the new political culture that emerged with the French Revolution.

Outside of France and its colonies, the conditions for a profound change of culture and politics were nowhere better than in the Ottoman Empire. Diplomatically, the French Revolution led to a rapprochement between France and the Sublime Porte, because Paris was looking to Istanbul in search of an ally. Also, Ottoman policymakers were often much less scandalized by the new political culture of the French than most of their European counterparts—and hence much more tolerant of the changes in diplomatic practice. Moreover, French expatriates in the Ottoman Empire benefitted from special privileges (the so-called *capitulations*) granted by the sultan, which guaranteed different national expatriate communities a high degree of legal autonomy. As a consequence, the French expatriate communities were administered by French government officials, and so when the regime changed in the mother country, the regime of the French

¹ 'Projet de mémoire pour servir d'instructions aux agents allant à Constantinople', 24 February 1794, Paris, Archives du Ministère des Affaires étrangères (MAE), CP Turquie 187, fol. 129.

communities in the Levant (i.e. the Eastern Mediterranean) changed as well. This comprehensive transformation of French diplomatic and administrative practice and culture in the context of the Ottoman Empire is the object of investigation of this study. The main argument of this book is that Franco-Ottoman diplomacy, as well as the French expatriate communities themselves, witnessed an extremely circumspect application of revolutionary policies, a 'revolution on silent feet'. This is surprising, insofar as French revolutionaries have often been associated with an uncompromising 'crusading mentality'² and with the readiness to use brute force in order to achieve ideological goals.

The findings of this study are even more fascinating, considering that the French revolutionaries in the Ottoman Empire adhered to the same ideals and political culture as their compatriots in France, which tells us something about the variability of ideology and practice.

This book thus contributes to central debates on the history of the French Revolution, namely on the role of ideology in the revolutionary process. In this context, the relationship between revolutionary ideology and terror is one of the key issues. Eminent historians of the French Revolution, such as Hippolyte Taine, Augustin Cochin, and François Furet have argued that terror and violence had been an intrinsic aspect of French revolutionary ideology since 1789. Other historians, such as Alphonse Aulard, Albert Mathiez, Georges Lefebvre, Albert Soboul, and Michel Vovelle described terror not as a consequence of French revolutionary political culture, but as a result of the severe circumstances and as a necessary evil which had to be accepted to save the young French Republic in the face of war and internal rebellion.³

Recent historians have challenged the strict dichotomy between the thesis of terror as a necessary consequence of the ideology of 1789 and the 'force of circumstances' thesis. Timothy Tackett, for example, argues that although 'circumstances had a powerful impact on the coming of the Terror', they do not suffice to explain what happened. He therefore suggests studying the transformation of the

² The term 'crusading mentality' should be used with caution in a context such as the French Revolution. Medieval crusaders, who took part in a mixture of military raid and pilgrimage, most clearly had a very different mentality from that attributed to French revolutionaries. Moreover, as this study will show, the notion that French revolutionaries were by default actively trying to revolutionize the rest of the world deserves a critical revision. Nevertheless, the term has been used in a number of excellent works. See e.g. Robert R. Palmer, *The Age of the Democratic Revolution: The Struggle*, 2 vols. (Princeton, 1964), vol. 2, 57; Percy M. Jones, *The Peasantry in the French Revolution* (Cambridge, 1988), 245; Suzanne Desan, Lynn Avery Hunt, and William Max Nelson, 'Introduction', in Suzanne Desan, Lynn Avery Hunt, and William Max Nelson (eds.), *The French Revolution in Global Perspective* (Ithaca, NY, 2013), 1–11, 3.

³ Timothy Tackett, *The Coming of the Terror in the French Revolution* (Cambridge, MA, 2015), 2; Marisa Linton, *Choosing Terror: Virtue, Friendship, and Authenticity in the French Revolution* (Oxford, 2013), 8. For an overview and discussion of historiography, see Dan Edelstein, 'What Was the Terror?', in David Andress (ed.), *The Oxford Handbook of the French Revolution* (Oxford, 2015), 453–70, 459–64; David Andress, 'The Course of the Terror: 1793–1794', in Peter McPhee (ed.), *A Companion to the French Revolution* (Oxford, 2013), 293–309; David Andress, *The Terror: Civil War in the French Revolution* (London, 2005), 5. On the emphasis of revolutionary violence in historiography, see Micah Alpaugh, *Non-Violence and the French Revolution: Political Demonstrations in Paris, 1787–1795* (Cambridge, 2015), 9–10.

psychology and *mentalité* of the revolutionaries during the revolutionary process and especially the role of fear.⁴ Also Marisa Linton, focusing on the politicians' terror, emphasizes the psychological dimension and shows how terror developed out of the Revolution itself.⁵ By focusing on the application of French revolutionary political culture in a socio-political context that differed greatly from mainland France, the present study contributes to a modified circumstances thesis that does not consider war and treason as sole causes for revolutionary excesses and that does not try to morally justify them.⁶ The case of the French revolutionaries in the Ottoman Empire reveals the very broad spectrum of how French revolutionary political culture could be put into practice in different contexts. The French republican protagonists in the Ottoman Empire shared the same political mindset and were no less zealous supporters of the revolutionary cause than their compatriots in France. Nevertheless, they acted differently—and they acted differently with the approval of the government and the Jacobin Club in Paris, even during the period which later came to be known as the Terror.⁷

APPROACH AND HISTORIOGRAPHY

This book is divided into three parts, each focusing on a different thematic aspect: Part I traces the development of diplomatic relations between France and the Ottoman Empire, from the defection of the last monarchist ambassador to the rupture of 1798; Part II analyses foreign policies and diplomatic practice during the French Revolution; and Part III focuses on the regime change within the French expatriate communities of the Levant.

The time frame set for this study begins with the end of the diplomatic *ancien régime* in 1792. Before this date, diplomacy was still a prerogative of the French king. The reforms of the early years of the French Revolution did not change this, but when the monarchy itself was called into question, most high-ranking diplomats chose to emigrate. This was also the fate of the last monarchist ambassador in

⁴ Tackett, *The Coming of the Terror in the French Revolution*, 348.

⁵ Linton, *Choosing Terror*, 286.

⁶ Linton, *Choosing Terror*, 9–10; Michel Biard (ed.), *Les Politiques de la terreur. 1793–1794* (Rennes, 2008); Jean-Clément Martin (ed.), *La Révolution à l'œuvre. Perspectives actuelles dans l'histoire de la Révolution française* (Rennes, 2005).

⁷ Historians vary in dating the beginning and ending of the Terror. I chose 5 September 1793, when Parisian demonstrators entered the National Convention and demanded that Terror be placed on the order of the day and 9 Thermidor II (27 July 1794), when a coup led to the fall from power of Robespierre and his closest companions. Both the dating and the concept of Terror as a coherent system of government, conceived and implemented by Robespierre and his allies in the Committee of Public Safety, have been criticized as an invention of those men who overthrew Robespierre and by later historiography. See Jean-Clément Martin, 'Violence/s et r/évolution. Les raisons d'un malentendu', in Michel Biard (ed.), *La Révolution française. Une histoire toujours vivante* (Paris, 2010), 169–95, 178–9; Jean-Clément Martin, *Violence et révolution. Essai sur la naissance d'un mythe national* (Paris, 2006), 186–9; Bronisław Baczkowski, *Comment sortir de la Terreur. Thermidor et la Révolution* (Paris, 1989); Edelstein, 'What Was the Terror?', 453–5; Marisa Linton, 'Terror and Politics', in David Andress (ed.), *The Oxford Handbook of the French Revolution* (Oxford, 2015), 471–86.

Istanbul, who left for Russia at the end of 1792. The end point chosen for this study is the rupture between France and the Ottoman Empire that resulted from the French invasion of the Ottoman province of Egypt in 1798. Peace between the two states was only restored with the Treaty of Amiens in 1802; by then, Napoleon had seized power in France and declared the Revolution to be over. Within this time frame, there is a special focus on the years 1793 to 1795, as these were the crucial years of radical change in the French expatriate communities, while the French Republic was still waiting for official recognition by the Ottoman government. This two-year period coincides with the tenure of office of the first French republican envoy to the Ottoman Empire (June 1793 to April 1795) and the Terror in France (September 1793 to July 1794).

The growing interconnectedness of the world was one of the truly universal markers of the early modern age (by which I understand roughly the time between 1500 and 1800).⁸ Nevertheless, past generations of historians have often tried to construct a great barrier—a kind of cultural iron curtain—between ‘Christian Europe’ and the ‘world of Islam’. Recent historiography, however, and in particular Ottomanist scholarship, has overcome the older barrier-paradigm.⁹ Also this study follows the Braudelian conception of the Mediterranean as a connection and not a barrier.¹⁰ Having grown out of a research project that studied the entanglement of European and Ottoman history, one of the goals of this book is to point to the connectedness of French and Ottoman history in the Age of Revolutions.¹¹

⁸ For a discussion of the early modern period’s applicability as a concept for Ottoman history, see Andreas Helmedach et al., ‘Das osmanische Europa. Zu Stand und Perspektiven der Forschung’, in Andreas Helmedach et al. (eds.), *Das osmanische Europa. Methoden und Perspektiven der Frühenzeitforschung zu Südosteuropa* (Leipzig, 2014), 9–23.

⁹ See e.g. Molly Greene, *A Shared World: Christians and Muslims in the Early Modern Mediterranean* (Princeton, 2000); Suraiya N. Faruqi, *The Ottoman Empire and the World around It* (London, 2006); Ian Coller, ‘East of Enlightenment: Regulating Cosmopolitanism between Istanbul and Paris in the Eighteenth Century’, *Journal of World History*, 21(3) (2010), 447–70; John-Paul A. Ghobrial, *The Whispers of Cities: Information Flows in Istanbul, London, and Paris in the Age of William Trumbull* (Oxford, 2013). For a bibliographic overview, see Eric R. Dursteler, ‘On Bazaars and Battlefields: Recent Scholarship on Mediterranean Cultural Contacts’, *Journal of Early Modern History*, 15 (2011), 413–34; Pascal Firges and Tobias P. Graf, ‘Introduction’, in Pascal Firges et al. (eds.), *Well-Connected Domains: Towards an Entangled Ottoman History* (Leiden, 2014), 1–13; Tobias P. Graf, ‘“I Am Still Yours”: Christian-European “Renegades” in the Ottoman Elite during the Late Sixteenth and Early Seventeenth Centuries’, doctoral thesis (Heidelberg University, 2013), 5–11, soon to be published as *The Sultan’s Renegades: Christian-European Converts to Islam and the Making of the Ottoman Elite, 1575–1610* (Oxford, forthcoming).

¹⁰ Fernand Braudel, *La Méditerranée et le monde méditerranéen à l’époque de Philippe II* (Paris, 1949); Henry Laurens, ‘Impérialisme européen et transformations du monde musulman’, in Henry Laurens, John Tolan, and Gilles Veinstein (eds.), *L’Europe et l’Islam. Quinze siècles d’histoire* (Paris, 2009), 271–426, 273.

¹¹ In a strict sense, it is problematic to oppose the terms ‘European’ and ‘Ottoman’, as the Ottoman Empire was also (though not exclusively) a European empire. To argue that this distinction is based on cultural difference presupposes a simplistic and essentialist understanding of culture. A distinction on religious lines is also problematic, as the Ottoman Empire was decidedly multi-religious and the other European states were dominated by a variety of Christian denominations. Nevertheless, for the lack of better terminology, I still use at times the designation ‘European’ when referring to those parts of Europe which were not dominated by the Ottoman Empire—although a huge part of the Ottoman population, including the sultan himself (for most of the time), were born and lived on the European continent.

Part I will do so by examining the Ottoman Empire's position and the role of Franco-Ottoman relations in European power politics. Part II sheds light on how Ottomans and French negotiated the implementation of the new French revolutionary political culture into Franco-Ottoman diplomatic practice. Part III will show how the Ottoman Empire, through the autonomy granted to the local French expatriate communities, provided the political framework for a French regime change on Ottoman soil. The Ottoman state and its inhabitants were thus entangled with the events and processes of the French Revolution not only through their diplomatic relations with France, but also through the (trans-)local offshoots of the Revolution in the French expatriate communities. Moreover, as Ali Yaycioğlu has convincingly argued, the reform discourses and policies of the late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century Ottoman Empire can very well be interpreted in a framework of converging processes during a plural Age of Revolutions, as presented by Christopher Bayly.¹² This book, which deliberately focuses on the French aspect, can therefore also be read as a complement to recent Ottomanist research.

Diplomatic history, and especially its more recent approaches, which put a strong focus on cultural aspects of diplomacy, are important points of reference for this study.¹³ This means, for example, that I am not only asking *what* was negotiated (in Part I), but I am also asking *how* international relations were shaped by the agents involved. Furthermore, I explore the ideological preconditions for the negotiations (in Part II).¹⁴

The focus on the emergence of a new revolutionary political culture is a central theme of this book, as it binds together the two main objects of this study: Franco-Ottoman diplomacy and the French expatriate communities. I am following Lynn Hunt's definition of political culture as the 'values, expectations, and implicit rules

¹² Ali Yaycioğlu, *Partners of the Empire: The Crisis of the Ottoman Order in the Age of Revolutions* (Stanford, 2016), esp. 1–9; Christopher Alan Bayly, *The Birth of the Modern World: 1780–1914* (Malden, MA, 2005), 86–120.

¹³ For a fairly comprehensive overview of this field of research, see the following historiographic surveys: Hillard von Thiessen and Christian Windler, 'Außenbeziehungen in akteurszentrierter Perspektive', in Hillard von Thiessen and Christian Windler (eds.), *Akteure der Außenbeziehungen. Netzwerke und Interkulturalität im historischen Wandel* (Cologne, 2010), 1–12; Ursula Lehmkuhl, 'Diplomatiegeschichte als internationale Kulturgeschichte. Theoretische Ansätze und empirische Forschung zwischen Historischer Kulturwissenschaft und Soziologischem Institutionalismus', *Geschichte und Gesellschaft*, 27 (2001), 394–423; Karina Urbach, 'Diplomatic History since the Cultural Turn', *The Historical Journal*, 46 (2003), 991–7; Heidrun Kugeler, Christian Sepp, and Georg Wolf, 'Einführung', in Heidrun Kugeler, Christian Sepp, and Georg Wolf (eds.), *Internationale Beziehungen in der Frühen Neuzeit. Ansätze und Perspektiven* (Hamburg, 2006), 9–35; Sven Externbrink, 'Internationale Politik in der Frühen Neuzeit. Stand und Perspektiven der Forschung zu Diplomatie und Staatensystem', in Hans-Christof Kraus and Thomas Nicklas (eds.), *Geschichte der Politik. Alte und Neue Wege* (Munich, 2007), 15–39; John Watkins, 'Towards a New Diplomatic History of Medieval and Early Modern Europe', *The Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies*, 38(1) (2008), 1–14.

¹⁴ This approach is inspired by Johannes Paulmann's book on encounters between monarchs: Johannes Paulmann, *Pomp und Politik. Monarchenbegegnungen in Europa zwischen Ancien Régime und Erstem Weltkrieg* (Paderborn, 2000), 9. Christian Windler has used a similar approach in his book on French Consuls in northern Africa: Christian Windler, *La Diplomatie comme expérience de l'autre. Consuls français au Maghreb 1700–1840* (Geneva, 2002).

that expressed and shaped collective intentions and actions'.¹⁵ In the field of Franco-Ottoman relations, the emergence of this new political culture generated a twofold process of renegotiating the practice of diplomacy. On the one hand, the policies and expectations of the French government towards its agents in the Ottoman Empire had to be revised. On the other hand, French diplomats and their Ottoman interlocutors had to rearrange their modes of dealing with each other.¹⁶

In the Ottoman Empire, diplomats were not only the representatives of their state; they were also the administrators of their communities of expatriates. In the French communities, the regime change and the accompanying cultural shift caused a destabilization of government authority similar to that in metropolitan France. However, if the new political culture was partly the cause of political instability in the administration of the French communities, it was also part of the solution to it: through its persuasive power and its mechanisms of social inclusion and exclusion, it became the rallying point for French republicans.¹⁷

In the context of the emergence of a new political culture in the expatriate communities and in French diplomacy, studying the symbolic or ritual manifestations of the regime change is of great importance. 'Culture is about "shared meanings"', writes Stuart Hall.¹⁸ Symbols or rituals represent such shared meanings, ideas, and concepts.¹⁹ Therefore, the French Revolution was also a 'revolution of rituals', as Barbara Stollberg-Rillinger remarks: 'Through the use of symbolic and ritual means the *ancien régime* was gradually stripped of its mystique [*entzaubert*]; and through symbolic and ritual means a new imagined community, the "sovereign nation", was created, which was now considered to be the origin of authority.'²⁰

Understandably, most research on the French Revolution focuses on events and processes within mainland France. This circumstance seems at first sight not only obvious, but indeed necessary. Why should historians not use a national frame of reference, if the events of the Revolution were so crucial for the formation of the French nation and the nation-state in general? Of course, it is hardly possible to conceive of an account of the French Revolution without external entanglements.²¹ Still, for a long time, research on the Revolution outside mainland France (e.g. in the colonies) was neglected and accounts of the Revolution remained largely internalist.²² Many of the works concerned with the 'external influences' of the French Revolution did not study sufficiently the interdependence of events

¹⁵ Lynn Avery Hunt, *Politics, Culture, and Class in the French Revolution* (Berkeley, Los Angeles, London, 1984), 10.

¹⁶ See Part II. ¹⁷ See Part III.

¹⁸ Stuart Hall, 'Introduction', in Stuart Hall (ed.), *Representation: Cultural Representations and Signifying Practices* (Los Angeles, 2011), 1–13, 1.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 5. ²⁰ Barbara Stollberg-Rillinger, *Rituale* (Frankfurt a. M., 2013), 124–5.

²¹ Bailey Stone, *Reinterpreting the French Revolution: A Global-Historical Perspective* (Cambridge, New York, 2002), 9.

²² For a historiographical review, see Lynn Avery Hunt, 'The French Revolution in Global Context', in David Armitage and Sanjay Subrahmanyam (eds.), *The Age of Revolutions in Global Context: c.1760–1840* (Basingstoke, 2010), 20–36, especially p. 22–4; See also Alan Forrest and Matthias Middell, 'Introduction', in Alan Forrest and Matthias Middell (eds.), *The Routledge Companion to the French Revolution in World History* (Abingdon, 2016), 1–20, 3–6.

and processes inside and outside of metropolitan France.²³ Recent scholarship, however, has been trying to put the French Revolution into a broader perspective. Thanks to the ‘global turn’, studies on global connections and entanglements of the French Revolution came into vogue. Many recent studies have tried to overcome asymmetries of influence implied in the methodological setup of much of the earlier historiography.²⁴

This book is much indebted to the methodological innovations the global turn brought about, notwithstanding the fact that this is much more of a local than a global case study. It deals largely with the entanglements of the French Revolution outside France, but it is not an exclusively externalist account. Instead, I am trying to adhere to Lynn Hunt’s suggestion and write an ‘account that can persuasively link external and internal causes, effects, and processes’ without detaching my study from the achievements of the historical research conducted in an internalist setting.²⁵

One way to conceptualize the connections between different frames of reference and their different levels of perspective (the local level of the French expatriate communities, the national level of French politics, and the international level of diplomacy) is the ‘translocality’ approach, elaborated by researchers of the Zentrum Moderner Orient in Berlin. This approach, which methodologically overlaps largely with the approach of an *histoire croisée*,²⁶ facilitates—and even calls for—the linking of different scales and frames of observation and analysis.²⁷ Translocality is understood here as ‘the sum of phenomena which result from a multitude of circulations and transfers. It designates the outcome of concrete movements of people, goods, ideas, and symbols which span spatial distances and cross boundaries, be they geographical, cultural or political.’²⁸ What is important in the context of the present book is that I am studying the *results* of exchange processes and connectedness. It should, therefore, be borne in mind that circulation and transfer underlie all the phenomena with which this study deals. As a consequence, I shift locations and perspectives frequently, in order to create a ‘multi-sited’ (in a very broad sense) account and to emphasize the connectedness of events and processes in Istanbul and Paris.

²³ David Armitage and Sanjay Subrahmanyam, ‘Introduction’, in David Armitage and Sanjay Subrahmanyam (eds.), *The Age of Revolutions in Global Context: c.1760–1840* (Basingstoke, 2010), xii–xxxii, xxx.

²⁴ To get an overview of the many studies produced in this context, see Suzanne Desan, Lynn Avery Hunt, and William Max Nelson (eds.), *The French Revolution in Global Perspective* (Ithaca NY, 2013); David A. Bell, ‘Questioning the Global Turn: The Case of the French Revolution’, *French Historical Studies*, 37(1) (2014), 1–24; Alan Forrest and Matthias Middell (eds.), *The Routledge Companion to the French Revolution in World History* (Abingdon, 2016).

²⁵ Hunt, ‘The French Revolution in Global Context’, 22.

²⁶ On *histoire croisée*, see Michael Werner and Bénédicte Zimmermann, ‘Beyond Comparison: Histoire Croisée and the Challenge of Reflexivity’, *History and Theory*, 45 (2006), 30–50.

²⁷ Ulrike Freitag and Achim von Oppen, ‘Introduction: “Transculturality”: An Approach to Connection and Transfer in Area Studies’, in Ulrike Freitag (ed.), *Translocality: The Study of Globalising Processes from a Southern Perspective* (Leiden, 2010), 1–21, 19.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 5.

Multi-perspectivity is a key element of both *histoire croisée* and the translocality approach. In most cases, what this means for historians is multi-archival research. The thorough analysis of the sources from four different diplomatic archives is one of the strengths of this study. I used the archive of the French foreign ministry in Paris; the archive of the French legation in Istanbul, which has been repatriated to Nantes; the British National Archives; and the Haus- Hof- und Staatsarchiv in Vienna. Out of these archives a number of different perspectives can be reconstructed. The French archives help to reconstruct the points of view of the central administration in Paris (foreign ministry and Committee of Public Safety) and of the French government agents in the Ottoman Empire. The British and Austrian archives reveal a variety of anti-French perspectives: that of the Austrian ambassador,²⁹ who was anti-revolutionary from his arrival in Istanbul in 1791; that of the representative of the royalist French *émigré* government (whose correspondence was preserved in Vienna); and that of the British diplomats (who were neutral until 1793 and who also, after entering the war against France, often took a different stance from their Austrian, Prussian, and Russian colleagues). The intersection of these perspectives helps us better to understand the positions of different agents and their interaction with each other. Furthermore, it enables us to explain and revise some misconceptions of earlier research.³⁰ This book is based, for the most part, on the abovementioned archival sources. As I am convinced that, especially for the kind of research I am conducting in this project, it is important to know not only *what* was said, but also *how* it was said, I quote extensively from my sources.

Although I am not trained in reading Ottoman Turkish, Ottoman sources are not entirely absent from this study. Ottoman officials and European diplomats communicated mostly in writing; and even during face-to-face meetings, their interpreters took minutes. These minutes and the translations of diplomatic notes (and often also the originals) have been preserved in European archives. This book is concerned with the official stance of the Ottoman government with regard to the new political situation that developed out of the regime change in France. For this purpose, the translations are valuable sources, helping to reconstruct the Ottoman government's policies. The various reports that European diplomats wrote about their negotiations with the Ottoman government add another perspective to the topic. Indeed, they sometimes help us to build up a more comprehensive picture of the Ottoman way of dealing with the effects of the French Revolution than Ottoman documents alone, provided we remain critically aware of the orientalist³¹ paradigms that are omnipresent in these reports.³²

²⁹ Austria in this context signifies the Habsburg monarchy reigned over by the Holy Roman Emperor Franz II since 1792. Only in 1804 was the Austrian Empire founded, and Franz II then became Franz I, the first Emperor of Austria.

³⁰ See e.g. Chapter 6.

³¹ On orientalism, see Edward Said's classic: Edward W. Said, *Orientalism: Western Concepts of the Orient* (London, 1978).

³² I should moreover remark that, according to Abderrahim Ben-Hadda and Frédéric Hitzel, the name-i hümayun collection of the Başbakanlık Arşivi in Istanbul (which holds, among other documents, copies of the official correspondence between the sultans and the sovereigns of Europe), seems not to have preserved any Franco-Ottoman diplomatic correspondence of the time between the

French diplomatic history during the Revolution is not such a well-researched field of study as one might imagine. Virginie Martin argues that the history of diplomacy during the French Revolution, and especially during the first three years of the Republic, has been neglected by both diplomatic historians and specialists of the French Revolution.³³ Our historiography of diplomatic relations during the Revolutionary Wars between 1792 and 1795, for example, still dates mostly from the late nineteenth and early twentieth century.³⁴ Albert Sorel's *L'Europe et la Révolution française*, published at the turn of the twentieth century, is still a prime work of reference.³⁵ There are numerous other studies in this field which help to provide a good understanding of the general power relations in Europe during the eighteenth century.³⁶ In the older literature, however, there is often a certain degree of marginalization of the Ottoman Empire's role in the European states system, as the Ottomans were—according to the predominant contemporary paradigm—not really part of Europe. One good example of this attitude is Frédéric Masson, who was surprised to find in the archives of the French foreign ministry so many references to the Ottoman Empire: 'Turkey was, no one knows why, the object of all the attention of the National Convention.'³⁷

Two major studies concerned exclusively with Franco-Ottoman relations during the revolutionary period are Édouard de Marcère's two-volume work on the mission of the first French republican envoy, Marie Louis Descorches, and İsmail Soysal's book *The French Revolution and Franco-Turkish Diplomatic Relations*.³⁸ Both studies draw largely on research in the archives of the French foreign ministry. However, while Soysal's book is a concise and thorough study of diplomatic history, Marcère's

establishment of the French Republic in 1792 and the Peace of Amiens in 1802. See Abderrahim Ben-Hadda and Frédéric Hitzel, 'Les Relations franco-ottomanes à travers les Nâme-i Hümayûn du Basbakanlık Arsivi', *Anatolia Moderna-Yeni Anadolu*, 3 (1992), 247–60, 254. On the usefulness of foreign sources for studying Ottoman history, see also Graf, 'I Am Still Yours', 4–5.

³³ Virginie Martin, 'La Diplomatie en Révolution. Structures, agents, pratiques et renseignements diplomatiques. L'exemple des agents français en Italie (1789–1796)', 3 vols., doctoral thesis (Université Paris 1, 2011), vol. 2, 75.

³⁴ Marc Belissa, 'War and Diplomacy (1792–1795)', in David Andress (ed.), *The Oxford Handbook of the French Revolution* (Oxford, 2015), 418–35, 418–19, 426–8.

³⁵ Albert Sorel, *L'Europe et la Révolution française*, 9 vols. (Paris, 1887–1904).

³⁶ e.g. Françoise Autrand et al. (eds.), *Histoire de la diplomatie française*, 2 vols. (Paris, 2007), vol. 1; Marc Belissa, *Repenser l'ordre européen (1795–1802). De la société des rois aux droits des nations* (Paris, 2006); Marc Belissa, 'Révolution française et ordre international', in Marc Belissa and Gilles Ferragu (eds.), *Acteurs diplomatiques et ordre international. XVIIIe–XIXe siècle* (Paris, 2007), 31–54; Lucien Bély (ed.), *L'invention de la diplomatie. Moyen Âge–Temps modernes* (Paris, 1998); Jeremy Black, *European International Relations: 1648–1815* (Basingstoke, 2002); Jeremy Black, *A History of Diplomacy* (London, 2010); Timothy C. W. Blanning, *The Origins of the French Revolutionary Wars* (New York, 1986); Timothy C. W. Blanning, *The French Revolutionary Wars: 1787–1802* (London, 1996); Sven Externbrink (ed.), *Formen internationaler Beziehungen in der Frühen Neuzeit. Frankreich und das Alte Reich im europäischen Staatensystem* (Berlin, 2001); Paul W. Schroeder, *The Transformation of European Politics: 1763–1848* (Oxford, 1994); Stone, *Reinterpreting the French Revolution*.

³⁷ Frédéric Masson, *Le Département des affaires étrangères pendant la Révolution. 1787–1804* (Paris, 1903), 267.

³⁸ Édouard de Marcère, *Une ambassade à Constantinople. La politique orientale de la Révolution française*, 2 vols. (Paris, 1927); İsmail Soysal, *Fransız ihtilâli ve Türk-Fransız Diplomasi Münasebetleri. 1789–1802* (Ankara, 1964).

work is mainly a paraphrase of the sources without real thematic focus. Apart from these monographs, historians have dedicated a great number of research articles to the topic of Franco-Ottoman relations during the French Revolution. This literature can be divided roughly into two groups. Articles published before the second half of the twentieth century are mostly products of the classic history of diplomacy, with its focus on power politics, events, and 'great men'.³⁹ Then, after the bicentenary of the French Revolution, the topic was taken up again: this time mostly by historians with an Ottomanist background, who were mainly interested in questions of the immediate impact of the French Revolution on the Ottoman Empire.⁴⁰ This field was pioneered by Bernard Lewis, who in 1953 published an article on what he called

³⁹ Frédéric Clément-Simon, 'La Révolution et le Grand Turc (1792–1796)', *Revue de Paris*, 14(1) (1907), 426–48; Frédéric Clément-Simon, 'Un ambassadeur extraordinaire russe à Constantinople à l'époque de Catherine II et de Sélim III', *Revue d'histoire diplomatique*, 21 (1907), 25–39; Paul Feuillatré, 'Un projet d'alliance monarchique sous la Terreur', *Bulletin du Comité des Travaux Historiques et Scientifiques, Section d'Histoire et de Philologie*, 1910, 208–45; Paul Feuillatré, 'Un cortège républicain à Constantinople le 20 Prairial an III (8 juin 1795)', *Feuilles d'histoire du XVIIe au XXe siècle*, 6 (1911), 511–22; Georges Grosjean, 'La Mission de Sémonville à Constantinople, 1792–1793', *La Révolution française*, 12 (1887), 888–921; Enver Ziya Karal, 'Fransa'nin Istanbul Elcilerinden Deschorches'un Osmanlı Devletinin Durumu Hakkında Raporu', *Belleten*, 4 (1940), 185–9; Salih Munir Pacha, 'Louis XVI et le sultan Sélim III', *Revue d'histoire diplomatique*, 26 (1912), 516–48.

⁴⁰ Grigorij L. Arš [Arch], 'L'Influence de la Révolution française dans les Balkans. D'après les documents des archives de politique extérieure de la Russie', *Études balkaniques*, 1 (1991), 34–9; Bertrand Badie, 'The Impact of the French Revolution on Muslim Societies: Evidence and Ambiguities', *International Social Science Journal*, 41 (1989), 5–16; Ian Coller, 'Egypt in the French Revolution', in Suzanne Desan, Lynn Avery Hunt, and William Max Nelson (eds.), *The French Revolution in Global Perspective* (Ithaca NY, 2013), 220–47; Ian Coller, 'The French Revolution and the Islamic World of the Middle East and North Africa', in Alan Forrest and Matthias Middell (eds.), *The Routledge Companion to the French Revolution in World History* (Abingdon, 2016), 117–33; Alexandru Duțu, 'Diffusion et réception des idées de la Révolution française', *Études balkaniques*, 1 (1991), 25–8; Gérard Groc, 'L'Impossible Accord', *ANKA*, 10 (1990), 33–9; Gérard Groc, 'Les Premiers Contacts de l'Empire ottoman avec la message de la Révolution française (1789–1798)', *Cahiers d'études sur la Méditerranée orientale et le monde turco-iranien (CEMOTI)*, 12 (1991), 21–46; Gérard Groc, 'Propagande révolutionnaire et presse française à Constantinople à la fin du XVIIIe siècle', in Daniel Panzac (ed.), *Histoire économique et sociale de l'Empire ottoman et de la Turquie (1326–1960). Actes du sixième congrès international tenu à Aix-en-Provence du 1er au 4 juillet 1992* (Paris, 1995), 795–811; Gérard Groc, 'La Traduction, clef de la diplomatie révolutionnaire à Constantinople', in Frédéric Hitzel (ed.), *Istanbul et les langues orientales* (Paris, 1997), 333–52; Frédéric Hitzel, 'Une voie de pénétration des idées révolutionnaires. Les militaires français à Istanbul', in Jean-Louis Bacqué-Grammont and Louis Bazin (eds.), *Mélanges offerts à Louis Bazin par ses disciples, collègues et amis* (Paris, 1992), 87–94; Frédéric Hitzel, 'Les Echos de la Révolution française à Istanbul', in Charles M. Kieffer (ed.), *D'une Révolution à l'autre* (Cernay, 1995), 145–55; Frédéric Hitzel, 'Les Ecoles de mathématiques turques et l'aide française (1775–1798)', in Daniel Panzac (ed.), *Histoire économique et sociale de l'Empire ottoman et de la Turquie (1326–1960). Actes du sixième congrès international tenu à Aix-en-Provence du 1er au 4 juillet 1992* (Paris, 1995), 813–25; Frédéric Hitzel, 'Les Interprètes au service de la propagande', in Frédéric Hitzel (ed.), *Istanbul et les langues orientales* (Paris, 1997), 351–63; Frédéric Hitzel, 'Les Relations franco-turques à la veille de l'expédition', in Paul Noirot and Dominique Feintrenie (eds.), *La Campagne d'Égypte, 1798–1801. Mythes et réalités* (Paris, 1998), 43–57; Onnik Jamgocyan, 'La Révolution vue et vécue de Constantinople (1789–1795)', *Annales historiques de la Révolution française*, 282 (1990), 462–9; Şerif Mardin, 'The Influence of the French Revolution on the Ottoman Empire', *International Social Science Journal*, 41 (1989), 17–31; Tamara Stoilova, 'La République française et les diplomates étrangers à Constantinople 1792–1794', *Bulgarian Historical Review*, 19(1) (1991), 64–75; V. N. Vinogradov, 'Quelques considérations sur l'impact de la Révolution française dans les Balkans', *Études balkaniques* 1 (1991), 29–33; Fatih Yeşil, 'Looking at the French Revolution through Ottoman Eyes: Ebubekir Ratib Efendi's Observations', *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies*, 70 (2007), 283–304.

'transmission of ideas' between revolutionary France and the Ottoman Empire.⁴¹ The focus of the present book, however, is not so much on the 'transmission of ideas' from the French to the Ottomans, but from metropolitan France to the French expatriate communities in the Ottoman Empire. This research focus has received much less attention, apart from a few articles⁴² and one monograph by Amaury Faivre d'Arcier, which is a useful description of the French administration in the Levant, before and during the French Revolution.⁴³

CHAPTER OUTLINE

Part I of this book, dealing with diplomatic negotiations between the French Republic and the Ottoman Empire, introduces the chronological framework of this study, by covering the entire period between 1792 and 1798. Chapter 1 deals with the regime change in French diplomatic representation, from the last ambassador of the king to the first envoy of the Republic. Chapter 2 recounts the numerous difficulties of negotiating during the most hazardous year of the Revolution: 1793. Chapter 3 examines the following years leading up to 1798, asking when and why the French Republic changed its policy towards the Ottoman Empire, from seeking an alliance to invading Egypt. These three chapters are not narrated solely from a French perspective; they also give an account of Ottoman policies towards the French.

After Part I has outlined the main themes of this study, Part II analyses French revolutionary policy-making and its implementation in the Ottoman Empire. Chapter 4 assesses the French revolutionary government's attitude towards diplomacy during the Terror. Chapter 5 investigates the effects of the emergence of a new political culture on the practice of diplomacy. The last chapter of Part II revisits the question, to what degree were French revolutionaries interested in propagating their ideology outside of France? These chapters show that, in the case of the Ottoman Empire, pragmatism generally outweighed ideological approaches in the conduct of French revolutionary foreign policy.

Part III shifts from the regime change in diplomacy to the regime change among French residents in the Levant. Chapter 7 deals with the frictions and the

⁴¹ Bernard Lewis, 'The Impact of the French Revolution on Turkey', *Journal of World History*, 1 (1953), 105–25.

⁴² Annie Berthier, 'Istanbul sous la cocarde révolutionnaire en l'an II. La correspondance d'Étienne-Félix Hénin, chargé d'affaires de la République française, 1793', in Muharrem Şen et al. (eds.), 200. *Yıldönümünde Fransız İhtilâli ve Türkiye Sempozyumunda sunulan bildiriler. Actes du Symposium sur le Bicentenaire de la Révolution française et la Turquie* (Konya, 1991), 99–109; Maurice Degros, 'Les Consulats français du Levant pendant la Révolution', *Revue d'histoire diplomatique*, 103 (1989), 61–111; Frédéric Hitzel, 'Étienne-Félix Hénin, un jacobin à Constantinople', *Anatolia moderna*, 1 (1991), 35–46; Georges Poisson, 'Un consul français à Alep et à Smyrne sous la Révolution. Jean-Charles Choderlos de Laclos', in Muharrem Şen et al. (eds.), 200. *Yıldönümünde Fransız İhtilâli ve Türkiye Sempozyumunda sunulan bildiriler. Actes du Symposium sur le Bicentenaire de la Révolution française et la Turquie* (Konya, 1991), 111–22.

⁴³ Amaury Faivre d'Arcier, *Les Oubliés de la liberté. Négociants, consuls et missionnaires français au Levant pendant la Révolution, 1784–1798* (Brussels, 2007). For a critique of Faivre d'Arcier's work, see Part III of this book.

destabilization of government authority caused by the French Revolution. Chapter 8 assesses the specific strategies applied by both local government officials and the central government in Paris to regain full control over their citizens. The last chapter examines how the new political culture of the French Revolution began to dominate the social life of the French communities in the Ottoman Empire.

EXPLORING THE FIELD: A SHORT INTRODUCTION TO THE TOPOGRAPHY OF THE OTTOMAN CAPITAL AND TO THE LIVING CONDITIONS OF ITS FRENCH INHABITANTS

In general, French residents in the Levant lived in the large commercial cities of the Ottoman Empire—such as Istanbul, Izmir, and Aleppo—in the same city quarters as other European foreigners. In maritime cities, the ‘Frankish’⁴⁴ neighbourhoods were usually situated close to the harbour. The French share in the Levant trade was considerable: before the Revolutionary Wars, French merchants controlled about three-fifths of the total European trade with the Ottoman Empire.⁴⁵ Most French residents in the Ottoman Empire were merchants or belonged to a merchant’s household.⁴⁶ The situation was slightly different in Istanbul, where a considerable number of French government employees and artisans were also found. Artisans such as jewellers and clockmakers lived off—and produced for—the local luxury market. Thus, for example, Jean-Jacques Rousseau’s father had worked as a clockmaker in the Ottoman capital for a few years in the early eighteenth century.⁴⁷ It is not clear exactly how many French citizens lived in the Ottoman Empire, but the number was small, probably not exceeding 1,500 people. Istanbul and Izmir were the largest communities, with maybe between 150 and 300 residents each.⁴⁸

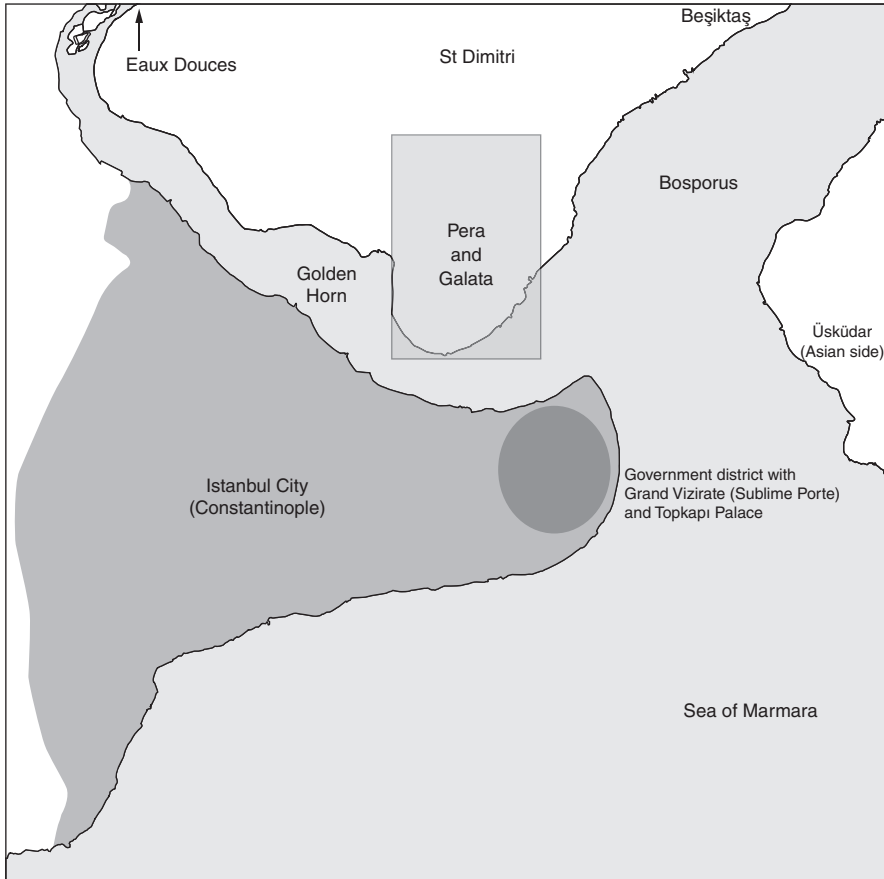
⁴⁴ The Ottomans used ‘Frank’ (*frenk*) as a generic term for Roman Catholic and Protestant Europeans who were not subjects of the Ottoman sultan. Cf. Bernard Lewis, ‘Ifrandj’, in Clifford Edmund Bosworth and Peri J. Bearman (eds.), *The Encyclopaedia of Islam*, 12 vols., 2nd edn (Leiden, 1960–2009), vol. 3, 1044–6, 1046.

⁴⁵ Murphy T. Orville, *The Diplomatic Retreat of France and Public Opinion on the Eve of the French Revolution: 1783–1789* (Washington, DC, 1998), 46.

⁴⁶ Faivre d’Arcier, *Les Oubliés de la liberté*, 41.

⁴⁷ Isaac Rousseau was, however, not French, but a citizen of Geneva. Rousseau’s family developed strong ties with the ‘East’: when the French consul in Baghdad was notified, in 1794, of a decree banning ex-nobles from diplomatic functions, he replied that he could easily prove that he was of non-noble origin, ‘because I am the cousin of Jean Jacques who is very famous and my father was clockmaker for the king of Persia’. See Rousseau to Descorches, 31 August 1794, MAE, CP Turquie 188, fol. 508.

⁴⁸ Estimates for the French population in the Ottoman capital vary greatly: Gérard Groc gives the number of 150 people in Istanbul, based on an unofficial contemporary estimate. See Groc, ‘Les Premiers Contacts de l’Empire ottoman avec la message de la Révolution française (1789–1798)’, 21. Onnik Jamgocyán, without mentioning his sources, refers to 250 persons at most. See Jamgocyán, ‘La Révolution vue et vécue de Constantinople (1789–1795)’, 462. Likewise, Frédéric Hitzel writes of around 200 French residents without giving a reference for his number. See Hitzel, ‘Étienne-Félix Hénin, un jacobin à Constantinople’, 37. A contemporary source, the French royalist representative in Istanbul, Chalgrin, estimated that about 500 French lived in Istanbul—possibly including newly arrived seamen.



Map I.1 Overview of Istanbul. Based on the ‘Plan de la ville de Constantinople et ses faubourgs’, by François Kauffer, drawn in 1776, improved 1786, in Marie-Gabriel-Auguste-Florent Choiseul-Gouffier, *Voyage pittoresque de la Grèce* (Paris, 1822), vol. 2.2, 452b.

A schematic map of Istanbul helps to clarify the geography of the Ottoman capital (see Map I.1). The old Byzantine city of Constantinople was situated on a peninsula between the Sea of Marmara in the south and the natural harbour of the Golden Horn in the north. At the end of the eighteenth century, the great majority of the Ottoman capital’s population still lived within the limits of the old Byzantine city

See Chalgrin to Flachslanden, 12 August 1794, Vienna, Haus-, Hof- und Staatsarchiv (HHStA), Diplomatisches Archiv, Türkei II, 107, July–September, fol. 298. Amaury Faivre d’Arcier, quoting from a survey of 1764, puts the number of residents in Istanbul at 144 and the total number of French in the Levant at about 700. See Faivre d’Arcier, *Les Oubliés de la liberté*, 14–15. It is certain that 138 Frenchmen took the civic oath on 14 July 1793 (even their names are known; see Chapter 9). It can be assumed, therefore, that all the aforementioned numbers (except maybe the 500 of Chalgrin) include only male adult residents. If this assumption is correct, then the figures should probably be doubled, at least, to account for women and children. The resulting figures can in no way be exact, since I have not been able to determine the gender ratio in the French communities, nor the number of married couples.

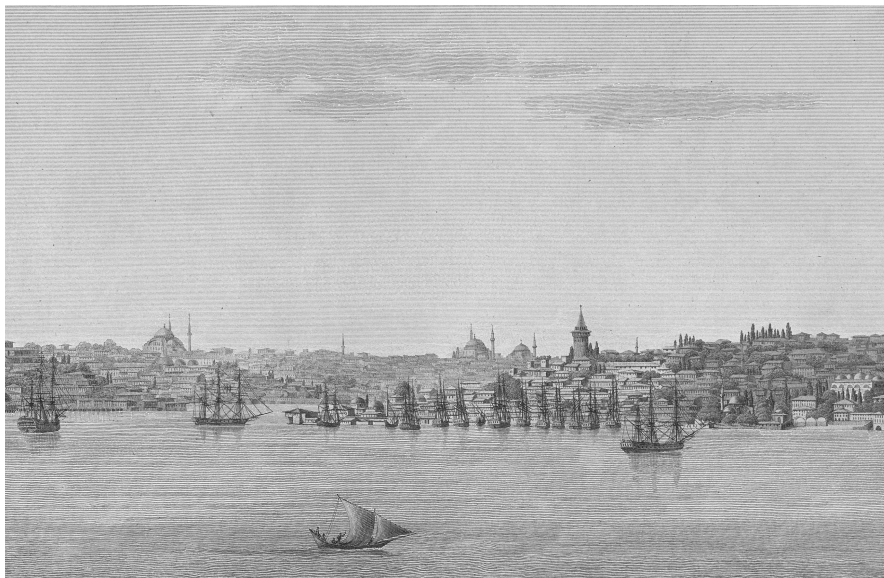


Figure I.1 The port of Galata, as seen from Üsküdar, on the Asian side, in a contemporary engraving. To the left can be seen the entrance of the Golden Horn. Further left, not visible here, is the Topkapı Palace. The Galata Tower in the centre roughly divides the former Genoese settlement (Galata) from Pera, situated on the hill's ridge to the right of the tower. The area to the extreme right at the foot of the hill is Tophane, named after the cannon foundry—the building with five domes, which houses today the Mimar Sinan Fine Arts University. Antoine Ignace Melling, 'Vue de Constantinople, prise de la tour de Léandre' (detail), in Antoine Ignace Melling, *Voyage pittoresque de Constantinople et des rives du Bosphore* (Paris, 1809), unpaginated. Digital image courtesy of the Getty's Open Content Program.

walls. The government area was located on the eastern tip of the peninsula, including the sultan's palace and the grand vizierate, the so-called Sublime Porte.⁴⁹ On the northern shore of the Golden Horn lay the former Genoese colony of Galata, which in 1453, in the direct aftermath of the Ottoman conquest of Constantinople, surrendered to Sultan Mehmet II without a fight and was in return privileged with a large degree of autonomy until the seventeenth century. As a result, Galata became the place of residence for merchants from Western Europe, the 'interface between Europe and the Ottoman world', to use Edhem Eldem's words (see Figure I.1).⁵⁰ Not only Western European Christians lived here. The area was also inhabited by Armenians, Greeks, Jews, Levantines,⁵¹ Ottoman Turks, and the descendants of

⁴⁹ Sublime Porte (Ottoman Turkish: *Bab-ı Ali*) is a metonym for the Ottoman government as a whole.

⁵⁰ Edhem Eldem, 'Istanbul: From Imperial to Peripheralized Capital', in Edhem Eldem, Daniel Goffman, and Bruce Masters (eds.), *The Ottoman City between East and West: Aleppo Izmir and Istanbul* (Cambridge, 1999), 135–206, 138.

⁵¹ Levantines were Latin Christians, mostly with Genoese and Venetian ancestors, who had become subjects of the Ottoman sultan. For a comprehensive study on the Levantines in Istanbul and Izmir, see

Iberian Muslim refugees who had been resettled here in the sixteenth century, fleeing from the Reconquista.⁵² James Dallaway, chaplain and physician of the British embassy during the 1790s, described Galata as 'at present the residence of many merchants of all nations, and the narrow streets . . . formed by shops and magazines for articles of European commerce'.⁵³

Over the centuries, the crowded population of Galata expanded northwards up a steep hillside towards the district named Pera.⁵⁴ Here, people settled alongside a gently inclined road (today's İstiklal Caddesi, formerly known as Grand rue de Pera) which followed the hill's ridge up to the Taksim area (see Map I.2).⁵⁵ Dallaway wrote: 'The great suburb of Pera stretches, for more than two miles⁵⁶ along the summit of a lofty hill. The streets intersect each other, are ill paved and irregularly built. This quarter has been long assigned to the corps diplomatique for their winter residence . . .'⁵⁷ The French had been the first to install their embassy in Pera, in the mid-sixteenth century.⁵⁸ By the eighteenth century, the embassy building had become a very representative palace (see Figure I.2). Dallaway gives a description of the social life of the foreign inhabitants of Pera:

The corps diplomatique, taken generally, live with great expense and magnificent suites, and their palaces, particularly those of Venice, France, and Sweden, are sumptuous, and delightfully situated. In the winter and during carnival, the gaiety of their society is more apparent; but in general, though the companies are large, conversational intercourse is burdened by etiquette and the shackles of ceremony are seldom forgotten. Amongst the other inhabitants of Pera there is nearly an equal mixture of European and Oriental manners. The men almost universally wear the dress of their own nation, but the ladies blend the French fashions with the Greek and produce a style by no means ungraceful.⁵⁹

Pera in the 1790s became a particularly interesting place, as Istanbul was one of the very few capitals in Europe where diplomats representing the French revolutionary state, as well as their opponents (including all other major powers of Europe), were present. The Ottoman capital thus became a place of direct diplomatic confrontation,

Oliver Jens Schmitt, *Levantiner. Lebenswelten und Identitäten einer ethnokonfessionellen Gruppe im osmanischen Reich im 'langen 19. Jahrhundert'* (Munich, 2005).

⁵² This is why one of the very few examples of Gothic architecture in Turkey, the former Saint Paul's church of Galata, which had been converted into a place for Muslim worship, later became known as the Arab Mosque (*Arap Camii*), because Iberian Muslims spoke Arabic.

⁵³ James Dallaway, *Constantinople Ancient and Modern: With Excursions to the Shores and Islands of the Archipelago and to the Troad* (London, 1797), 124.

⁵⁴ Eldem, 'Istanbul', 152.

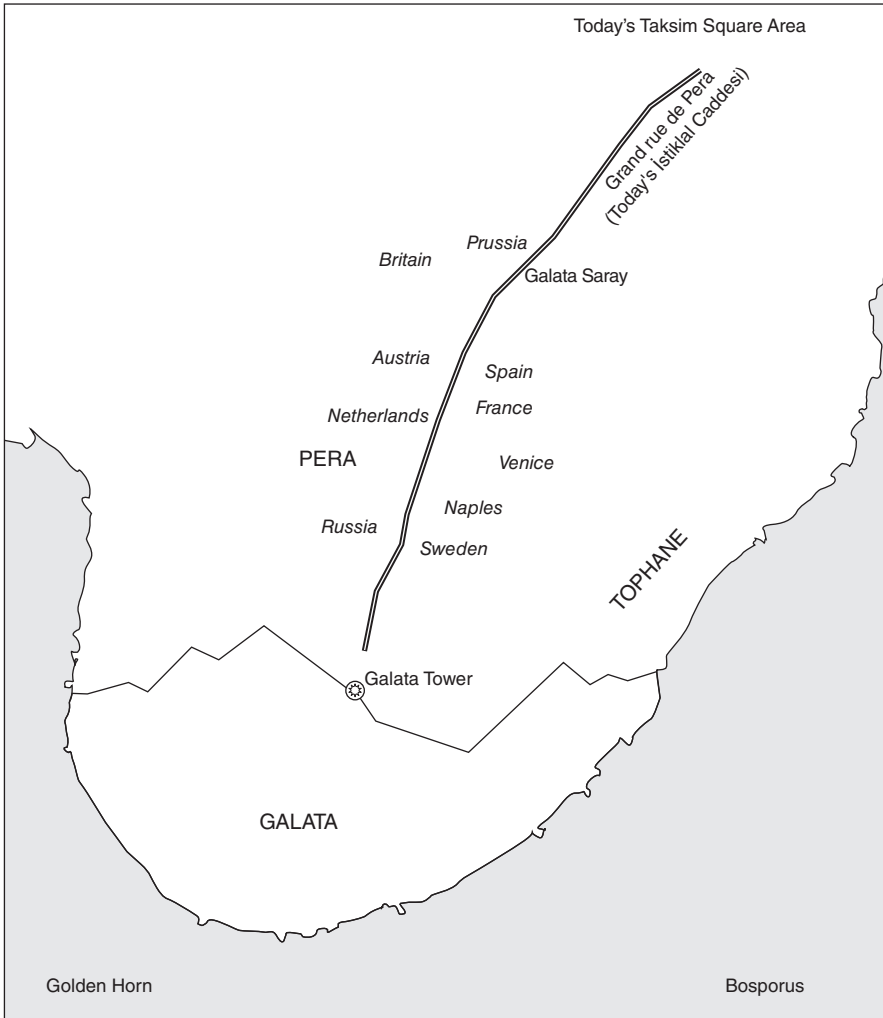
⁵⁵ The name Taksim derives from Turkish *taksim etmek* (to distribute), as this site was the end point of an aqueduct from the forest of Belgrade (a location about 20 km away, not to be confused with the capital of Serbia), built in the first half of the eighteenth century. In Taksim, a great reservoir was built, distributing the water into the different city quarters north of the Golden Horn. The reservoir still exists today, housing an art gallery. It is an inconspicuous elongated stone structure, embellished only by several fountains.

⁵⁶ Actually 1 mile or a little less than 2 km.

⁵⁷ Dallaway, *Constantinople Ancient and Modern*, 125. In summer, most foreign diplomats preferred to retire to the vicinity of the Bosphorus village of Büyükdere.

⁵⁸ Eldem, 'Istanbul', 157.

⁵⁹ Dallaway, *Constantinople Ancient and Modern*, 127.



Map I.2 Istanbul north of the Golden Horn. Labelled in *italics* are the legations of the European diplomatic corps, situated alongside the main street of Pera (today's İstiklal Caddesi), which connects Galata with the Taksim area. Based on the 'Plan de la ville de Constantinople et ses faubourgs', by François Kauffer, drawn in 1776, improved 1786, in Marie-Gabriel-Auguste-Florent Choiseul-Gouffier, *Voyage pittoresque de la Grèce* (Paris, 1822), vol. 2.2, 452b.

where the representatives of each of the belligerent states tried to pull the Ottoman government into their respective camps. The Sublime Porte, on the other hand, adhered to a policy of neutrality until the invasion of Egypt in 1798. Meanwhile, the Ottoman Empire witnessed a kind of revolution from above, through the great reform efforts of Sultan Selim III (r. 1789–1807). His New Order (*Nizam-ı Cedid*) aimed at

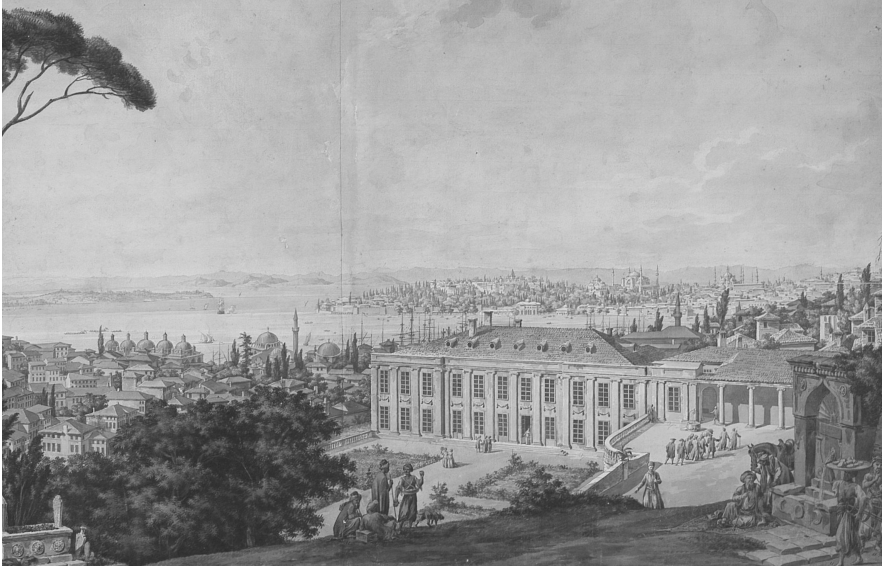


Figure I.2 View of the French embassy, taken from the Austrian embassy. Contemporary drawing. Jan Chrystian Kamsetzer, 'Vue de Constantinople prise de l'hôtel d'Allemagne à Pera' (detail), National Library of Poland (Biblioteka Narodowa), Ikonographic collections (Zbiory ikonograficzne), R. 498. Courtesy of the National Library of Poland.

comprehensive fiscal and military reform, as well as a project to establish the first permanent Ottoman embassies in other European capitals.⁶⁰

THE OTTOMAN EMPIRE IN THE EUROPEAN DIPLOMATIC SYSTEM

The conduct of diplomacy in the Ottoman capital differed from diplomacy in other European capitals in a number of ways. For instance, foreign ambassadors visited the government district of Istanbul only on extremely rare occasions. The French dragoman Venture de Paradis explained this in an account written in 1785, emphasizing and slightly exaggerating the importance of his own profession:⁶¹

The ambassador and the consuls do not know a word of the languages which are necessary to deal, either orally or in writing, with the local people. Upon their

⁶⁰ On the reign of Selim III, see Stanford J. Shaw, *Between Old and New: The Ottoman Empire under Sultan Selim III, 1789–1807* (Cambridge, MA, 1971). Shaw's book is not accurate in every detail (see Chapter 6). For an excellent very concise introduction into some of the general characteristics of the Ottoman state and the reforms of under Selim III, see Yaycıoğlu, *Partners of the Empire*, 19–63.

⁶¹ Dragomans were interpreters and mediators, who, especially when working for embassies, also had some legal training.

arrival, they seek and obtain an audience with the sovereign or the governors. This purely ceremonial first visit once made, our ambassador and our consuls do not show themselves again [at the government], however long their residence in this country may be and whatever matter may come up. All affairs there are handled by interpreters who are vulgarly called dragomans.⁶²

In fact, the first dragoman of the embassy carried out most of the daily business with Ottoman government officials, delivering and discussing written diplomatic notes from the ambassador. For this purpose, the dragomans of all embassies gathered on a weekly basis with the *reis efendi*—or *reis ül-küttab*—the Ottoman official who fulfilled functions similar to those of a foreign minister. As Dallaway explains:

At the Porte no levees are held for foreign ministers. On their arrival they have each his audience with the vizier and sultan, but on their departure with the former only. During the whole of their residence all business is transacted by memorial and confidential message, which are presented on Thursdays, the divan day, by the senior dragoman of each mission; but should any matter of more moment arise, a private meeting is arranged between the minister and the reis efendi, at a kiosque called Bebek serai, on the Bosphorus (see Figure I.3).⁶³

The Ottoman Empire had a unique position in the diplomatic system of Europe. Istanbul had been part of the European diplomatic network ever since the system began to take shape. As early as 1454, shortly after the Ottoman conquest of Istanbul and at a time when even in Italy resident diplomacy had just begun to develop, Venice installed its diplomatic representative (*bailo*) permanently in Galata.⁶⁴ The first residential ambassador of France arrived in 1535, followed by the English in 1583, and the Dutch in 1612.⁶⁵ Thus, resident diplomacy had become usual in Istanbul, even before it became the norm in the diplomatic system of Europe from the second half of the seventeenth century onwards.⁶⁶ However, the Ottoman state, with its imperial ideology, had always played a special role in the system of diplomacy.⁶⁷ While accepting the establishment of foreign embassies in Istanbul from early on, the Sublime Porte did not reciprocate this process until the reign of Selim III.⁶⁸ Yet,

⁶² Quoted in Hitzel, 'Les Interprètes au service de la propagande', 352.

⁶³ Dallaway, *Constantinople Ancient and Modern*, 125.

⁶⁴ Bülent Ari, 'Early Ottoman Diplomacy: Ad Hoc Period', in A. Nuri Yurdusev (ed.), *Ottoman Diplomacy: Conventional or Unconventional?* (New York, 2004), 36–65, 39; Matthew S. Anderson, *The Rise of Modern Diplomacy: 1450–1919* (London, 1993), 6–7.

⁶⁵ Ari, 'Early Ottoman Diplomacy', 39. See also Eric R. Dursteler, 'The Bailo in Constantinople: Crisis and Career in Venice's Early Modern Diplomatic Corps', *Mediterranean Historical Review*, 16(2) (2001), 1–30; Daniel Goffman, 'Negotiating with the Renaissance State: The Ottoman Empire and the New Diplomacy', in Virginia H. Aksan and Daniel Goffman (eds.), *The Early Modern Ottomans. Remapping the Empire* (Cambridge, 2007), 61–74.

⁶⁶ Hamish Scott, 'Diplomatic Culture in Old Regime Europe', in Hamish Scott (ed.), *Cultures of Power in Europe during the Long Eighteenth Century* (Cambridge, 2007), 58–85, 70.

⁶⁷ A. Nuri Yurdusev, 'The Ottoman Attitude toward Diplomacy', in A. Nuri Yurdusev (ed.), *Ottoman Diplomacy: Conventional or Unconventional?* (New York, 2004), 5–35.

⁶⁸ The first Ottoman resident ambassador arrived in London in 1793; then followed Paris, Berlin, and Vienna, all in 1797. See Thomas Naff, 'Reform and the Conduct of Ottoman Diplomacy in the Reign of Selim III: 1789–1807', *Journal of the American Oriental Society*, 83 (1963), 295–315, 303–4.

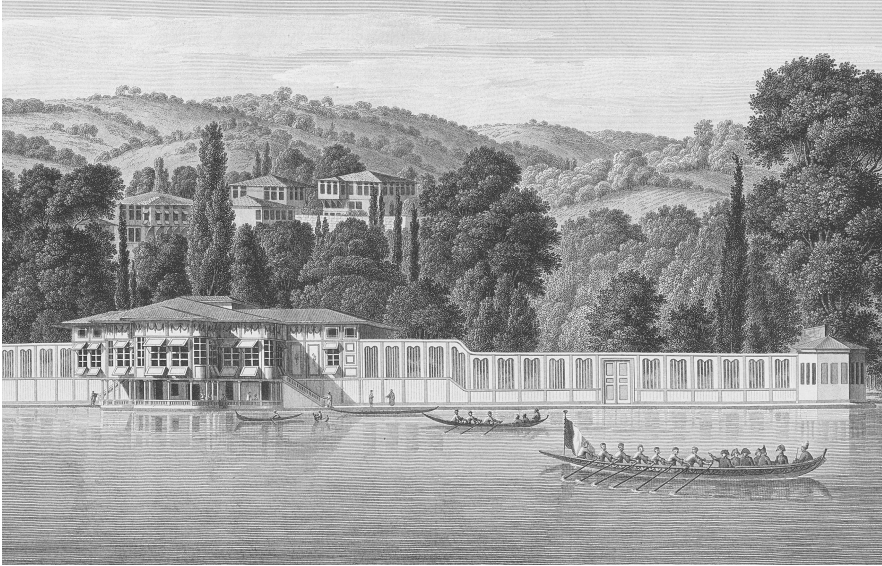


Figure I.3 A depiction of the seaside mansion (*yali*) in Bebek on the Bosphorus, used for diplomatic conferences. This contemporary engraving shows the arrival of a French delegation (in the boat on the far right). Antoine Ignace Melling, ‘Kiosque de Bébek, pavillon destiné aux conférences des ministres de la Porte ottomane avec ceux des puissances étrangères, sur la rive européenne du Bosphore’ (detail), in Antoine Ignace Melling, *Voyage pittoresque de Constantinople et des rives du Bosphore* (Paris, 1809), unpaginated. Digital image courtesy of the Getty’s Open Content Program.

this special position does not mean that the Ottomans were not a part of the system, as some older scholarship would have it.⁶⁹ During the entire early modern era, the Ottoman Empire was indisputably a member of the European diplomatic network.⁷⁰ Likewise, the notion that the Ottoman administration of foreign affairs was ‘underdeveloped’ or inefficient has to be reconsidered, if early modern standards are applied. It should not be forgotten that the British foreign office, for example, was only created in 1782. Recent scholarship has shown, to quote Will Smiley, that:

the Ottoman state in the eighteenth century was neither inept nor backward, but continued to make pragmatic, rational decisions. These decisions emanated from what

⁶⁹ See Will Smiley, ‘“When Peace Is Made, You Will Again Be Free”: Islamic and Treaty Law, Black Sea Conflict, and the Emergence of “Prisoners of War” in the Ottoman Empire, 1739–1830’, doctoral thesis (University of Cambridge, 2012), 5.

⁷⁰ This is, for example, why Istanbul was counted among the courts of Europe in diplomatic manuals, e.g. Jean Dumont and Jean de Rousset Missy, *Supplément au corps universel diplomatique du droit des gens [...]. Le cérémonial diplomatique des cours de l’Europe [...]* (Tome 2), 5 vols. (Amsterdam, 1739), vol. 5. See also Geoffrey R. Berridge, ‘Diplomatic Integration with Europe before Selim III’, in A. Nuri Yurdusev (ed.), *Ottoman Diplomacy: Conventional or Unconventional?* (New York, 2004), 114–30.

Europeans called ‘the Porte’—the Ottoman central decision-makers, including the Imperial Council (*divan*), the grand vizier, the *reis efendi* (de facto foreign minister), the scribal service, and, especially under Selim III and Mahmud II, the sultan himself.⁷¹

For French diplomats, the post of ambassador to the Sublime Porte was a highly prestigious appointment even before the Revolution. Eminent statesmen, such as the later foreign minister of Louis XVI, Vergennes, had served here. In French protocol, Istanbul ranked only behind Rome, Vienna, Madrid, and London. Moreover, thanks to the corps of dragomans, no other legation, except perhaps that of Rome, had more employees.⁷² Between early 1792 and the end of 1793, the number of French foreign legations fell from twenty-three to three. France had an official representative only in the Ottoman Empire, in Switzerland, and in the United States. The situation remained unstable. In summer 1794, French diplomatic representation existed only in Denmark, Sweden, the Ottoman Empire, and Switzerland. In other neutral states, France had placed only *chargés d'affaires* or minor government agents.⁷³ Thus, Istanbul was the most important posting for French diplomacy during the years 1793 and 1794, until the preliminaries of the Peace of Basel, which led to the end of war with Prussia and Spain.⁷⁴

CONNECTIONS AND DISTANCES

For inhabitants of the old quarters of Istanbul, within the limits of the Byzantine walls, the world of European diplomacy and commerce was not part of their daily lives. Galata and Pera were, until the nineteenth century, perceived as somewhat detached from the rest of the city. People from the peninsula would only go there if they had specific business.⁷⁵ On the other hand, together these two city quarters constituted one of Istanbul’s ‘translocal hubs’, connecting the Ottoman capital, through its port, with the wider Mediterranean and with the north-west of Europe.

How were French expatriates connected to France? How did they communicate with their home country? These are crucial questions, as they refer to the preconditions of translocality. The history of ‘the French Revolution in the Ottoman Empire’ can only be narrated if there was a close connection and exchange between people living in the Ottoman Empire and people living in France. And indeed, French expatriates were strongly linked to their home country through their commercial activities. Furthermore, they read the same newspapers, and corresponded frequently with their business partners, friends, and kin. The French in France and the French in the Ottoman Empire thus shared the same discursive universe. Without these preconditions, the political culture of the French

⁷¹ Smiley, ‘“When Peace Is Made, You Will Again Be Free”’, 4.

⁷² Maurice Degros, ‘La Révolution’, in Jean Baillou (ed.), *Les Affaires étrangères et le corps diplomatique français. De l’Ancien Régime au Second Empire*, 2 vols. (Paris, 1984), vol. 2, 279–359, 305–6.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, 314–15.

⁷⁴ Cf. *Ibid.*, 320.

⁷⁵ Eldem, ‘Istanbul’, 147, 153–4.

Table I.1 Example of delivery times for dispatches from Istanbul to Paris. MAE, CP Turquie 186, fol. 381.

Dispatch number	Date of the letter	Date of reception in Paris	Days to delivery
13	1 September 1793	5 November 1793	65
14	10 September 1793	12 October 1793	32
15	12 September 1793	7 November 1793	56
16	18 September 1793	7 November 1793	50
17	25 September 1793	3 November 1793	39
18	26 September 1793	3 December 1793	68
19	10 October 1793	20 November 1793	41
21	25 October 1793	06 December 1793	42
22	10 November 1793	25 December 1793	45
23	25 November 1793	5 January 1794	41

Revolution would not have spread so quickly and comprehensively in the French communities of the Levant.

Two main lines of communication existed between Istanbul and France. One was a fortnightly overland courier to Vienna, reopened in 1791 when peace was restored between the Ottoman Empire and Austria.⁷⁶ From there, letters were forwarded by ordinary postal services. The other option was to send letters by sea, often via Izmir to Marseille.⁷⁷ Owing to the French Revolutionary Wars, both methods of communication became less reliable.⁷⁸ Letters between Istanbul and Paris had an average delivery time of six to seven weeks (see Table I.1). This was as long as it took for dispatches to travel across the Atlantic.⁷⁹

In many ways, America offers an interesting point of comparison for this study—and not only because of the travelling distance from France, or because Istanbulites today like to think of their city as the New York of the Mediterranean. During the Revolution, French citizens in America and in the Ottoman Empire could openly profess their allegiance to (or disapproval of) the new regime in France. Both the United States and the Ottoman Empire followed a policy of neutrality, and large parts of both countries' elites were sympathetic to the French Republic. However, whereas French residents in the United States had to follow American laws, in the Ottoman Empire they enjoyed legal autonomy. Hence, as the Revolution encompassed the entire state and society in France, it also reached out to its branches in the Ottoman Empire, as the following chapters will demonstrate.

⁷⁶ Ainslie to Grenville, 25 October 1791, Kew, The National Archives (TNA), FO 78/12, fol. 169.

⁷⁷ Before the Revolution, Marseille had a highly privileged trading position with the Levant. See Faivre d'Arcier, *Les Oubliés de la liberté*, 72–5.

⁷⁸ See Chapter 2.

⁷⁹ Sarah M. S. Pearsall, *Atlantic Families: Lives and Letters in the Later Eighteenth Century* (Oxford, 2008), 35.

PART I

FRANCO-OTTOMAN RELATIONS
DURING THE REVOLUTION

1

The End of the French Diplomatic *Ancien Régime*

This history of the French Revolution in the Ottoman Empire begins in the summer of 1792, not in 1789, for it was not until the final weeks of the French monarchy that the French diplomatic and consular establishments in the Eastern Mediterranean witnessed the full impact of the regime change in the mother country.¹ Admittedly, the French living in the Ottoman Empire were not ignorant of the commotions that, by that time, had shaken France for three years. However, it was the outbreak of war and the downfall of the king which led to the replacement of monarchist government agents, altered the conduct of diplomacy, and changed the disposition of the French administration in the Levant. The purpose of this chapter is to explain how French old regime diplomacy ended in 1792 and how the Ottoman government and the diplomatic corps in Istanbul reacted to this regime change.

TRAITOR AND MOST LOYAL SERVANT: THE LAST AMBASSADOR OF THE MOST CHRISTIAN KING

Although the French Revolution started in 1789, at first it had no major impact on the life of French residents in the Levant, nor on the conduct of diplomacy. French trade in the Levant was still flourishing, as it had been in the 1780s.² Until 1792, foreign policy was a prerogative of the French king, and the foreign ministry was one of the old regime's most persistent strongholds in the French government.³ In the words of the historian Jacques Godechot: 'Under the *ancien régime*—and this lasted until 1792—diplomacy was directed by the king with the help of the foreign minister.'⁴

¹ Cf. Jamgocyan, 'La Révolution vue et vécue de Constantinople (1789–1795)', 465.

² Faivre d'Arcier, *Les Oubliés de la liberté*, 162.

³ Degros, 'La Révolution', 282–3.

⁴ Jacques Godechot, *La Grande Nation. L'expansion révolutionnaire de la France dans le monde de 1789 à 1799*, 2nd edn (Paris, 1983), 133; cf. Marc Belissa, 'L'Entretien impossible? Ministres monarchistes et envoyés républicains 1795–1799', in Stefano Andretta (ed.), *Paroles de négociateurs. L'entretien dans la pratique diplomatique de la fin du Moyen âge à la fin du XIXe siècle* (Rome, 2010), 333–54, 333.

Yet there were some minor incidents which, in retrospect, seem to foreshadow what was to come. In 1790, there had been quarrels and acts of insubordination on French navy ships cruising in the Eastern Mediterranean, which had forced the commander of the squadron to sail back to France.⁵ Indiscipline among the crews was mainly due to irregular pay and the overdue arrival of a replacement squadron. Old regime government officials complained about a loss of authority; and French residents in the Ottoman Empire, influenced by the news they received from France, started criticizing the French administration, pressing for their newly achieved liberties.⁶ This 'fermentation of minds', as Amaury Faivre d'Arcier put it, had not yet become as threatening as in the motherland, where those affiliated with the old regime began to flee their country.⁷ In the Levant no adherent of the old political system had yet requested the protection of a foreign power against the revolutionary menace.

For the Ottoman government and the European expatriate communities in the Ottoman Empire, the Revolution might have seemed to be pretty much an internal affair of the French. The war the Ottoman Empire fought with Russia and Austria occupied the diplomatic corps in Istanbul much more than the commotions in France. Only the peace treaties, concluded in Sistova (on 4 August 1791, with Austria) and Jassy (9 January 1792, with Russia), would change this. Therefore, in 1790, the British ambassador could still report:

Notwithstanding the alarming accounts circulated over all Europe, I am happy to assure Your Grace, that the most perfect tranquillity continues in this residence, nor have we received the least intimation of any disturbance what[so]ever in any commercial scale [i.e. trading city] throughout this extensive empire, a circumstance very uncommon even in times of most profound peace.⁸

An important factor of continuity, toning down the upheavals that had overwhelmed the mother country, was the French diplomatic and consular personnel. Many of the French government agents had been serving in the Levant for decades. None of them had yet been replaced because of the Revolution at home.⁹

Take, for example, the French ambassador in Istanbul, who had been in his post since 1784. Count Marie-Gabriel-Auguste de Choiseul-Gouffier was a man of the old regime. Coming from an aristocratic family, he had made his diplomatic career under the patronage of Marie Antoinette.¹⁰ He was a man of the Enlightenment and not opposed to reform. He might have accepted a constitutional monarchy, but he could not tolerate a regime that disempowered his king, and this in the end led to his defection.

During the first years of the Revolution, Choiseul-Gouffier chose, possibly with some reluctance, to implement those few innovations that affected the French administration in the Ottoman Empire. He arranged for the recognition of a new

⁵ Faivre d'Arcier, *Les Oubliés de la liberté*, 99–100.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 101.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 99.

⁸ Ainslie to Leeds, 8 January 1790, TNA, FO 78/11, fol. 3.

⁹ Degros, 'La Révolution', 318–19.

¹⁰ Virginia H. Aksan, 'Choiseul-Gouffier at the Sublime Porte, 1784–1792', in Virginia H. Aksan (ed.), *Ottomans and Europeans. Contacts and Conflicts* (Istanbul, 2004), 59–66, 30.

French flag, which replaced the white banner of the old regime.¹¹ At the same time, he warned his compatriots not to demonstrate their patriotism openly, because it might irritate the local inhabitants.¹² When, at the end of 1790, the National Assembly required all diplomatic and consular agents to pledge allegiance to the new political system,¹³ he wrote to Louis XVI that he would do so only to fulfil the king's wishes:

By ordering me to sign the oath without delay, Your Majesty... is himself the guarantor that it contains no obligation contrary to my intentions, which I have not ceased to express and which nothing can weaken: I can but obey my king—and obey blindly.¹⁴

Count Choiseul-Gouffier, and indeed the entire French administration in the Ottoman Empire, remained ostensibly loyal to the French government as long as it was still formally subordinate to the king. With the progress of the French Revolution, however, Choiseul-Gouffier's resistance to the new regime also progressed. Owing to the lobbying of his close friend, Napoleon's later master diplomat Talleyrand, he could have become foreign minister. Nevertheless, he decided not to return to France. In early 1792, he also rejected new assignments to such prestigious posts as the embassies in Rome, Vienna, or London. The French government left Choiseul-Gouffier in Istanbul until after the rupture with Austria, in April 1792. Now it became essential to replace Choiseul-Gouffier, because he, having belonged to the entourage of the queen, was rightly deemed a supporter of the anti-French Coalition.¹⁵

The outbreak of the Revolutionary Wars had a major impact on both the Revolution in France and the French communities in the Levant. Advocates of the war included both supporters and enemies of the monarchy. Many monarchists hoped that the disorganized French army would lose against the Prusso-Austrian Coalition and that, consequently, the king's full sovereignty could be re-established.

¹¹ On 21 October 1790, the National Assembly decreed that the white flag of the French monarchy should be replaced with the three 'national colours'. The resulting problem, that such a flag would be difficult to distinguish from the Dutch flag, was solved on 24 October by an amendment, stipulating that the stripes had to be in the sequence red-white-blue, but in vertical and not horizontal alignment. See 'Bulletin de l'Assemblée nationale. Séance du dimanche 24 octobre', *Moniteur universel*, No. 298, 25 October 1790. In practice, the French navy used until 1794 a white flag with the three colours in the upper corner. Furthermore, flags with horizontal stripes or other designs using the three colours were not uncommon throughout the revolutionary period. The *tricolore* we know today, with the colour sequence blue-white-red, was decreed by the National Convention on 15 February 1794. See 'Convention nationale. Suite de la séance du 27 pluviôse', *Moniteur universel*, No. 149, 17 February 1794. On the inauguration of the flag of 1794 in Istanbul, see Chapters 7 and 9.

¹² Faivre d'Arcier, *Les Oubliés de la liberté*, 118.

¹³ The oath required all government agents outside of France to pledge 'loyalty to the nation, the law, and the king, [and] to maintain with all [their] power the Constitution decreed by the National Assembly and accepted by the king', and to protect all French citizens within their jurisdiction. See 'Bulletin de l'Assemblée nationale. Séance du mercredi 17 novembre', *Moniteur universel*, No. 322, 18 November 1790.

¹⁴ Choiseul-Gouffier to Louis XVI, 22 February 1791, quoted in Léonce Pingaud, *Choiseul-Gouffier. La France en Orient sous Louis XVI* (Paris, 1887), 248.

¹⁵ Pingaud, *Choiseul-Gouffier*, 249–51.

Those in favour of the monarchy's abolition asserted that the war would stabilize the Revolution by weakening its external enemies. The authority of the king had been greatly diminished even before the war. After his unsuccessful flight to Varennes, in June 1791, Louis XVI had become little more than a highly privileged prisoner.

Choiseul-Gouffier was well aware of his master's distress; and as the nation turned its back on the king, his most loyal servant turned his back on the nation. Nevertheless, the ambassador to the Ottoman government, unlike many of his colleagues, did not resign from his post in the wake of the flight to Varennes.¹⁶ However, by the time he received his letter of recall on 7 August 1792, Choiseul-Gouffier's loyalty to the French government had become a matter of mere decorum. Since June 1792 he had been secretly corresponding with the brothers of Louis XVI, who were the leaders of the French *émigration*, the Count of Provence (the later King Louis XVIII), and the Count of Artois (the later King Charles X). Now he took immediate action to counteract the government's decision. In his eyes, this was no treason, but loyalty to the legitimate sovereign of France. He considered the mission of his successor as detrimental to the interests of the French monarchy, because the new ambassador would certainly try to provoke a new war between the Ottoman Empire and either Russia or Austria. Both countries had just concluded peace with the Sublime Porte, after several years of conflict. A new war would weaken the anti-French Coalition and thus impede a quick victory over the revolutionary army and the return of the old order in France. Choiseul-Gouffier, therefore, saw it as his mission to cooperate with the Austrian, Russian, and Prussian ministers, in order to secure his successor's rejection by the Ottoman government.¹⁷

The peace treaties of Sistova and Jassy and the return of the Russian and Austrian legations to the Ottoman capital led to a considerable strengthening of the diplomatic anti-French coalition in Istanbul in 1792. Since the declaration of Pillnitz, of 27 August 1791, the French had faced growing hostility from Austria and Prussia. Russia did not actively join the war against France until 1799, but in 1792, Russian diplomats were exerting themselves against the French as vigorously as the members of the First Coalition.¹⁸ This powerful diplomatic opposition to the French was a fundamental change of the year 1792. Choiseul-Gouffier, with the help of the anti-French coalition, devised a plan to 'mitigate the perfidious insinuations of the National Assembly, by possibly making the Grand Seigneur [i.e. the Ottoman sultan] reject their emissary, or . . . by multiplying the obstacles for him, and by constantly frustrating his efforts'.¹⁹ While the recalled French ambassador

¹⁶ Louis Bergès, 'Le Roi ou la Nation? Un débat de conscience après Varennes entre diplomates français', *Revue d'histoire diplomatique*, 98 (1984), 31–46, 33.

¹⁷ Choiseul-Gouffier to the Count of Provence and the Count of Artois, 10 August 1792, MAE, CP Turquie 183, fol. 157.

¹⁸ The First Coalition fought revolutionary France between 1792 and 1797. Its main members were Austria (1792–7), Prussia (1792–5), Britain (1793–7), the Netherlands (1793–5), Spain (1793–5), Portugal (1793–5), Sardinia (1792–6), and Naples (1793–7).

¹⁹ Choiseul-Gouffier to the Count of Provence and the Count of Artois, 10 August 1792, MAE, CP Turquie 183, fol. 158.

kept himself aloof, the ministers of Austria, Prussia, and Russia presented their emphatic protests against the new French ambassador to the Ottoman government.

Choiseul-Gouffier's designated successor was a certain Charles-Louis Huguet Sémonville, a diplomat with the reputation of being a fervent supporter of the French Revolution.²⁰ Building on this reputation, the Prussian, Austrian, and Russian representatives, with the help of the envoy of Naples, tried to convince the Ottoman government to refuse him accreditation as French ambassador to the Sublime Porte. On 9 August 1792, only two days after Choiseul-Gouffier had received his letter of recall, the Imperial internuncio,²¹ the Prussian envoy, and the Russian chargé d'affaires separately submitted notes to the Sublime Porte denouncing Sémonville as a dangerous agitator who had already been rejected as diplomat to the court of Sardinia in Turin.²² The Austrian internuncio, Peter von Herbert-Rathkeal, wrote of the designated ambassador:

The bloodthirsty Jacobin faction, willing to spread everywhere the spirit of discord and anarchy by which it is driven, has just sent to Constantinople *one of its most dangerous members*, named Sémonville; a man so *noted for the perversity of his principles* that several courts have already declined or refused to admit him in the role of a minister or even on their territory. *The execrable projects* of this emissary, known to the imperial and royal [i.e. Austrian] court, *aim at nothing less than to reverse the perfect harmony so happily re-established between our two empires, [in order] to prepare a diversion in favour of those hordes of villains*, while His Imperial Majesty, [together] with his august allies, is trying to prevent them from devastating the whole of Europe.²³

This was the first time that the Ottoman government had been confronted with an anti-revolutionary propaganda campaign aimed at discrediting a French diplomat, and the proponents of the new political order in France. It was also the first time that the Ottoman government had to declare itself either in favour of, or against, the revolutionary government: a state of affairs the Sublime Porte would have certainly preferred to avoid.

One person who could have facilitated the recognition of the new French ambassador arrived in Istanbul three days after the joint action of the anti-revolutionary diplomats, on 12 August 1792. Since the French government wanted to replace Choiseul-Gouffier as soon as possible, and given the lengthy preparations for Sémonville's embassy, his first secretary (and former secretary of Choiseul-Gouffier's embassy) Louis-Antoine Chalgrin was sent to Istanbul to replace the old ambassador as chargé d'affaires.²⁴ Chalgrin, who was a supporter of the constitutional monarchy, tried to facilitate the succession of Sémonville, but he was not able to defy his former master, who did not cede his place to Chalgrin.

²⁰ Grosjean, 'La Mission de Sémonville à Constantinople, 1792–1793', 891–2.

²¹ The title internuncio, normally only used by representatives of the pope, was also used by the Austrian envoys to Istanbul. In the following, internuncio and ambassador are used interchangeably.

²² Grosjean, 'La Mission de Sémonville à Constantinople, 1792–1793', 905.

²³ 'Mémoire remis à la Porte par l'internonce impérial', 9 August 1792, quoted in Grosjean, 'La Mission de Sémonville à Constantinople, 1792–1793', 901. Emphases in original.

²⁴ Clément-Simon, 'La Révolution et le Grand Turc (1792–1796)', 427.

Choiseul-Gouffier avoided presenting Chalgrin to the Sublime Porte. Consequently, the Ottomans considered the old ambassador to be still in charge until his replacement by a new ambassador.²⁵

Sémonville's standing at the Sublime Porte was difficult because he had no able supporters, and also because the precedent of the court of Sardinia's earlier refusal to receive him further undermined his position.²⁶ On 18 August, in order to avoid a confrontation, especially with Austria and Russia, the Porte submitted a note to Choiseul-Gouffier, in which it asked the French government to dispatch another person as French ambassador to Istanbul.²⁷ The refusal to recognize Sémonville shows how strong the anti-revolutionary faction in Istanbul had become. As a result, the French government postponed sending Sémonville to Istanbul until 1793. This was partly due to the Ottoman rejection, and partly because Sémonville was, for some time, under suspicion of being a counter-revolutionary.²⁸ Sémonville was never to arrive in Istanbul: when he was finally on his way to the Ottoman capital, on 25 July 1793, he was unlawfully arrested on neutral territory by Austrian troops at Novate Mezzola, in the Valtellina.²⁹

The Ottoman refusal to receive Sémonville enabled Ambassador Choiseul-Gouffier to continue his double game, maintaining the façade of fulfilling his duty by reporting to Paris, and secretly supporting the counter-revolution. He presented the intrigue to prevent the arrival of Sémonville as a result of the anti-French coalition's machinations. He tried to convince his government that it was impossible to do anything about the Sublime Porte's decision. Since the Ottoman government had asked him to remain in office and had not granted him a farewell audience, he decided to stay in his post and to wait for new orders from His Majesty.³⁰ In a letter addressed to his successor Sémonville, however, Choiseul-Gouffier made it very clear that he was not a partisan of the new regime:

Although we do not, Monsieur Ambassador, have the same political opinions on the current state of our unfortunate country [*patrie*], I beg you to believe that I will never lose sight of what I owe to the representative of the king, and that my principles oblige me to contribute to the execution of His Majesty's orders, happy to be able to give him this last proof of my dedication and my unalterable fidelity.³¹

Choiseul-Gouffier's manoeuvrings did not go unnoticed by the diplomatic community. The British ambassador, who was not a supporter of the Revolution,

²⁵ Chalgrin to Foreign Minister, 18 August 1792, MAE, CP Turquie 183, fols. 163–5; Roberto Cessi, 'Émile Gaudin et la politique française à Constantinople en 1792, I', *Revue historique de la Révolution française et de l'Empire*, 6 (1914), 236–53, 244–5; Clément-Simon, 'La Révolution et le Grand Turc (1792–1796)', 428.

²⁶ Clément-Simon, 'La Révolution et le Grand Turc (1792–1796)', 427.

²⁷ The Ottoman Grand Vizier to the Prime Minister of France, 18 August 1792, MAE, CP Turquie 183, fols. 179–80; Grosjean, 'La Mission de Sémonville à Constantinople, 1792–1793', 912–14; Gaudin to Koch, 25 August 1792, MAE, CP Turquie 183, fol. 185.

²⁸ Clément-Simon, 'La Révolution et le Grand Turc (1792–1796)', 427; Report about Sémonville, 28 January 1793, MAE, CP Turquie 184, fol. 226.

²⁹ Marcère, *Une ambassade à Constantinople*, vol. 1, 52.

³⁰ Choiseul-Gouffier to Foreign Minister, 22 August 1792, MAE, CP Turquie 183, fols. 174–5.

³¹ Choiseul-Gouffier to Sémonville, 26 August 1792, MAE, CP Turquie 183, fols. 191–2.

nevertheless commented rather critically on the French ambassador's entanglement in the intrigue leading to the rejection of his successor:

The . . . negotiations, guided by Baron Herbert [the Austrian ambassador] were conducted in a manner so open and indiscreet as to affect, I fear, the credit and reputation of poor Count Choiseul, who is closely watched by the agents of the ruling faction at home and who, after submitting so long to the present government, will be of course accused of having forgotten that he is a Frenchman.³²

The French ambassador was not able to continue this course of action for very long. It was not the 'agents of the ruling faction at home' who forced him into direct opposition to the government in Paris, but the events which ensued in France on and after 10 August 1792.³³ Choiseul-Gouffier had always openly professed that his loyalty was to the king. He could, therefore, retain his show of loyalty to the government only as long as the king was still the head of government. Hence, when reliable reports of the king's deposition arrived at the Ottoman capital, the French ambassador had to show his colours.

WHO WILL REPRESENT FRANCE? FROM THE KING'S LAST TO THE REPUBLIC'S FIRST MINISTER

The news of the suspension and imminent abolition of the French monarchy reached Count Choiseul-Gouffier about one month after he had received his letter of recall.³⁴ In response, he openly cut his ties with the French government. On 14 September 1792, he submitted a note to the Ottoman government, in which he announced his resignation as ambassador and in which he urged the Sublime Porte to take over the administration of the French expatriate communities in the Levant:

The Comte de Choiseul-Gouffier has just received confirmation of the horrible news that had already transpired: the greatest crimes were committed in his unhappy country [*patrie*] by a horde of villains who have agonized and dishonoured it for the last three years. The oldest ally of the Sublime Porte . . . is now captive in the hands of rebels . . . Loyal until death to the blood of his masters and to the old constitution of the French empire, . . . the undersigned does not consider himself able to continue the exercise of powers which he had held by order of his sovereign, then free, then all-powerful. At present, he can no longer act, be it as ambassador or as head of the French communities in the Levant, and he has no means to vouch for the good conduct of individuals, the policing of the *échelles*,³⁵ and the maintenance of the capitulations. In this current state of anarchy, only the Sublime Porte is entitled to decide upon the

³² Ainslie to Grenville, 25 August 1792, TNA, FO 78/13, fol. 152.

³³ On 10 August 1792, a popular insurrection took place in Paris, which led to the storming of the Tuileries Palace and the de facto deposition of Louis XVI. The date is often referred to as the end of the liberal phase of the French Revolution.

³⁴ The suspension was an effect of the insurrection of 10 August 1792; the Inauguration of the Republic followed on 21 September 1792.

³⁵ The term *échelles du Levant* refers to the large Ottoman cities with European merchant communities.

necessary measures to ensure the existence of the French... and [to] maintain good order among them...³⁶

In another declaration to the Ottoman government, Choiseul-Gouffier announced that he would leave Istanbul to join the royalist troops fighting under the command of the king's brothers.³⁷ His decision was, however, not final. He changed his plans at the beginning of October, after he had received letters informing him that the *émigré* government, headed by the king's brothers, had ordered him to represent the French royalists at the Sublime Porte.³⁸

Therefore, the former French ambassador tried to become recognized once again as the representative of the French king—a post from which he had resigned roughly two weeks earlier. How could he receive the acknowledgement of the Ottoman government, if his only legitimization was a letter from the former French king's brothers? Choiseul-Gouffier decided that the best way to foster his base of legitimacy was to pressure the French community into requesting his return. He therefore ordered the entire embassy to be closed down and decreed that embassy officials who disregarded this order were to be considered as rebels against their king.³⁹

His decision had serious consequences for the French merchant community in Istanbul. The French residents relied on the legal protection of their ambassador and his dragomans. When they were tried in an Ottoman court, they had the right to be represented by a dragoman of the embassy. Every business contract concluded by the merchants was registered at the French legation's chancellery. The greatest problem for the French, however, was the absence of an authorized head of the community who could deal with the Ottoman authorities. Such a representative was crucial, since there were constant complaints about arbitrary actions of the Ottoman administration that required mediation. Ottoman officials 'perceived any community as legitimate only as long as it was represented by a recognized authority, thus excluding most possibilities of obtaining support on an individual basis'.⁴⁰ The Frenchman Émile Gaudin, whose part in events will be related later, described the difficult situation of the French community:

The embassy of Constantinople is now without any leaders and without any officials: this sad situation causes stagnation in political matters, in business affairs, [and] uncertainty for individuals in their civil status; since, according to the capitulations, the French govern themselves by their laws and their ambassador acts as a kind of magistrate, who ensures their compliance with the laws and who protects them against [undue] initiatives of the Turks. Thus, at this moment, there is no ambassador, no

³⁶ Choiseul-Gouffier to the Sublime Porte, 14 September 1792, quoted in Grosjean, 'La Mission de Sémonville à Constantinople, 1792–1793', 909–10.

³⁷ He did so on 24 September 1792. See Roberto Cessi, 'Émile Gaudin et la politique française à Constantinople en 1792, I', *Revue historique de la Révolution française et de l'Empire*, 6 (1914), 236–53, 247.

³⁸ The letter reached Choiseul on 4 October 1792. See Cessi, 'Émile Gaudin et la politique française à Constantinople en 1792, II', 57–8; Marcère, *Une ambassade à Constantinople*, vol. 1, 40.

³⁹ Cessi, 'Émile Gaudin et la politique française à Constantinople en 1792, II', 58.

⁴⁰ Eldem, 'Istanbul', 188.

administration, and consequently no more laws, no more protection, anarchy, confusion, and risks of all kinds.⁴¹

The need for official protection and representation, and the continuous rumours that the revolutionary government was about to lose the war and collapse, induced the French merchants to ask Choiseul-Gouffier to act once more as the head of the French community and to reopen the embassy. On 7 October 1792, twelve of the thirteen leading French merchants in Istanbul therefore agreed to acknowledge him as the principal of the French *nation*⁴² in Istanbul. The merchants referred to themselves as 'loyal subjects of the king' and to Choiseul-Gouffier as the 'representative of our legitimate sovereign'.⁴³

This declaration was a victory for Choiseul-Gouffier, as he succeeded in inducing the vast majority of French merchants to oppose the deposition of Louis XVI, even if only for opportunistic reasons. The French merchants' declaration was later denounced as a counter-revolutionary act, and it played an important role in the internal disputes that arose in the French community during the following years.⁴⁴ The now reinstated head of the French community then requested the Sublime Porte to recognize him once again as the French representative. The Ottoman government was not opposed to Choiseul-Gouffier staying in office until the arrival of another French minister. However, it did not want to recognize the French *émigré* government. Therefore, the Sublime Porte required Choiseul-Gouffier to have himself officially appointed by the French merchants as their interim representative, pending his replacement by another ambassador. The Ottoman government thus insisted on a procedure that conformed with the capitulations regime.⁴⁵ In the official letter of reply, the Porte summarized the decision in the following manner:

In a word, it is necessary that the ambassador, our friend, in order to prevent any disturbance to the business of the French merchants, to comply with the old rules, and to maintain the treaties and friendship which bind [our] two empires, will not part from this court before it is known what resolution the court of France will take; and that in the meantime he will continue . . . to deal with the affairs of France.⁴⁶

Although the French archives hold only the translation of the Ottoman government's decision, it very much looks as if the wording of this declaration had been changed as a result of the events of 10 August: the document does not mention the

⁴¹ Gaudin to Koch, 18 October 1792. Gaudin's letter was intercepted in Venice and can be found in the Archivio di Stato di Venezia, Inquisitori di Stato, file 930. Roberto Cessi cited this and other intercepted letters *in extenso*. See Cessi, 'Émile Gaudin et la politique française à Constantinople en 1792, II', 55. A duplicate of the letter can be found in MAE, CP Turquie 183, fols. 292–7. Gaudin wrote his letter in the Bosphorus village of Büyükdere. He was, therefore, not aware that Choiseul-Gouffier had already resumed his functions one day before.

⁴² In the context of the French expatriate communities in the Ottoman Empire, the term *nation* (in this study always in italics) referred during the *ancien régime* to guild-like privileged corporations of French merchants (mostly operating on behalf of the big trading companies in Marseille).

⁴³ Declaration of the French *nation* of Istanbul, 7 October 1792, MAE, CP Turquie 183, fol. 281.

⁴⁴ See Chapters 7 and 8.

⁴⁵ Cf. Ainslie to Grenville, 25 October 1792, TNA, FO 78/13, fol. 167.

⁴⁶ Sublime Porte to Choiseul-Gouffier, 16 October 1792, MAE, CP Turquie 183, fol. 310.

French king. Instead it refers to the 'court of France' as the authority deciding the nomination of ambassadors. This formulation notwithstanding, Choiseul-Gouffier willingly accepted the Porte's decision. On 17 October, he informed the diplomatic community that the embassy's chancellery would be reopened the next day.⁴⁷

Even though it seemed that his strategy had been successful, in fact it granted Choiseul-Gouffier less than two months' reprieve. The events of the remote battlefields of Western Europe were to have an important impact on his prospects. In the wake of the Battle of Valmy,⁴⁸ the advancing French troops captured some of the letters Choiseul-Gouffier had written to the king's brothers. On 22 October 1792, the National Convention in Paris decreed his indictment for treason.⁴⁹ Furthermore, the French victories on the battlefield made it clear to everyone that the fall of the monarchy was not a temporary political lapse.

In Istanbul, the main figure in the activities leading to Choiseul-Gouffier's final removal was a young man who had come to the Ottoman capital as a tourist. Claude-Émile Gaudin was the son of a French foreign ministry official, who, after studying public law in Strasbourg, completed his education with a grand tour that took him to the shores of the Bosphorus.⁵⁰ Gaudin seems to have been in Istanbul since 1791.⁵¹ As a firm supporter of the French Revolution, he started to correspond with French Foreign Minister Lebrun and with his former teacher Koch (now a member of the committee for diplomacy of the National Convention), reporting on the situation in the Ottoman capital.

The French embassy's personnel were still attached to the monarchy, while the merchants were for the most part politically opportunistic. However, when news of the indictment of Choiseul-Gouffier and the victories of the republican armies reached Istanbul, the former ambassador's position became untenable. Most of the French merchants installed in the Levant acted on behalf of the major trading houses in Marseille.⁵² The local merchant community was, therefore, susceptible to pressure from their partners in France.⁵³ That the trading houses in Marseille had a

⁴⁷ TNA, FO 78/13, fol. 171.

⁴⁸ The battle of Valmy (20 September 1792) enabled the French revolutionary army to stop the troops of the Austro-Prussian Coalition in their march on Paris.

⁴⁹ 'Convention nationale. Séance du lundi 22 octobre', *Moniteur universel*, No. 297, 23 October 1792.

⁵⁰ Born in 1768, Gaudin studied public law at Strasbourg, one of the most eminent schools for future diplomats at the time. See Adolphe Robert, Edgar Bouloton, and Gaston Cougny, *Dictionnaire des parlementaires français*, 5 vols. (Paris, 1891), vol. 3, 182; Frédéric Masson, *Les Diplomates de la Révolution. Hugo de Bassville à Rome. Bernadotte à Vienne* (Paris, 1882), 165. On the formation of French diplomats in the eighteenth century, see Claire Béchu, 'Les Ambassadeurs français au XVIII^e siècle. Formation et carrière', in Lucien Bély (ed.), *L'Invention de la diplomatie. Moyen Âge-Temps modernes* (Paris, 1998), 331–46. Since the seventeenth century, the grand tour had become a custom among young wealthy men from Northern Europe. It was an educational voyage, and in most cases Italy was the main destination, but the remains of classical Greece and Istanbul were also popular among travellers. See Philip Mansel, 'The Grand Tour in the Ottoman Empire, 1699–1826', in Paul Starkey (ed.), *Unfolding the Orient: Travellers in Egypt and the Near East* (London, 2001), 41–64.

⁵¹ Clément-Simon, 'La Révolution et le Grand Turc (1792–1796)', 429.

⁵² Faivre d'Arcier, *Les Oubliés de la liberté*, 41–5.

⁵³ Gaudin to Koch, 8 November 1792, Archivio di Stato di Venezia, Inquisitori di Stato, 930, quoted in Cessi, 'Émile Gaudin et la politique française à Constantinople en 1792, II', 71.

good deal of influence on the political behaviour of the Istanbul merchants can be seen from a Venetian report of 1793, stating that some French merchants were still secretly supporting the *émigré* government and thus the monarchy. They were, however, afraid to do so openly, because they did not want to lose their business partners.⁵⁴ To overcome the 'merchants' aristocracy' in Istanbul, Gaudin suggested in October 1792 that the old assembly of the *nation*, which was formed by thirteen merchants, ought to be replaced by a general assembly. Such an assembly should 'consist of all Frenchmen over 21 years, residing for at least one year in the Levant . . . and living honestly off the product of their work or industry'.⁵⁵ Such a democratic assembly, Gaudin hoped, would also bring to an end Choiseul-Gouffier's authority.⁵⁶

In November, the foreign minister ordered Gaudin to put the plan of a general assembly in Istanbul into effect.⁵⁷ In the meantime, the merchants of Galata became increasingly displeased with their diplomatic representative. Choiseul-Gouffier, no longer receiving funds from Paris, now demanded that the merchants should pay for the maintenance of the embassy, including the salaries of the ambassador and his staff.⁵⁸ Reports of the indictment of Choiseul-Gouffier reached Istanbul probably in the first week of December. On 8 December, probably at Gaudin's instigation, a general assembly was convoked. This was the first time that an important matter was decided not by the guild-like corporation of thirteen merchants who constituted the *nation* hitherto, but by a democratic assembly of all (male) citizens. The term *nation* was now broadened and used in the minutes to signify all French residents in Istanbul (it was not undisputed, though, as will be seen in Chapter 9).⁵⁹ A mere forty-one Frenchmen attended this meeting, even though the French residents of Istanbul and also the captains of French merchantmen in the harbour were invited to gather. At later general assemblies, around ninety people were usually present. This suggests that many French residents did not want to decide yet between monarchy and republic, and therefore abstained from attending an assembly with an obviously pro-revolutionary character. The assembly's minutes announced nonetheless that this was the moment 'when patriotism, which had been compromised for too long, finally triumphed over the obstacles which the perfidious agents of despotism had set against it'.⁶⁰ At the assembly, the convened citizens elected the retired first dragoman of the embassy, Antoine Fonton, as the new provisional principal of the French *nation* in Istanbul.

⁵⁴ Report of the Venetian Bailo (minister) Foscari, 25 April 1793, Archivio di Stato di Venezia, Dispacci dei Bailo di Costantinopoli al Senato, 238, no. 28, quoted in Cessi, 'Émile Gaudin et la politique française à Constantinople en 1792, II', 91.

⁵⁵ Gaudin to Koch, 18 October 1792, Archivio di Stato di Venezia, Inquisitori di Stato, 930, quoted in Cessi, 'Émile Gaudin et la politique française à Constantinople en 1792, II', 61.

⁵⁶ Ibid., 62. ⁵⁷ Instructions for Gaudin, MAE, CP Turquie 184, fols. 30–1.

⁵⁸ Gaudin to Koch, 1 December 1792, MAE, CP Turquie 184, fols. 53–4.

⁵⁹ Minutes of the general assembly of the French *nation* in Istanbul, 8 December 1792, MAE, CP Turquie 184, fols. 64–5.

⁶⁰ Minutes of the general assembly of the French *nation* in Istanbul, 8 December 1792, MAE, CP Turquie 184, fol. 64.

Gaudin became Fonton's secretary. He continued as secretary of the French legation until 1795.

Shortly after his election, the Ottoman government also acknowledged Fonton. Count Choiseul-Gouffier, although confirmed as the king's ambassador by the 'Regent of France',⁶¹ chose the safety of Russian exile over his post in Istanbul and authorized Chalgrin to represent the royalist government. After the fall of the monarchy in France, Chalgrin cooperated with Choiseul-Gouffier and continued as chargé d'affaires of the regent until 1797, when he followed his predecessor into Russian exile.⁶² The new provisional administration of the French community, however, did not bring long-lasting stability. The arrival of the news of Louis XVI's execution, and of the pope's threat of excommunicating Catholics who cooperated with the French Republic, led to the defection of most of the embassy's personnel. At the end of March 1793, all the staff—excepting one dragoman, but including the provisional principal, Antoine Fonton—announced their resignation.⁶³

Although the French communities in the Ottoman Empire were now without a representative in the capital, the Ottoman government still tried to deal with the French residents on the basis of the privileges granted to them in the capitulations. The Sublime Porte was, for example, not interested in taking over legal responsibility for dealing with internal disputes between French citizens. It was decided, therefore, that the rights granted by the capitulations concerning navigation, commerce, and policing should be provisionally conferred on the so-called 'deputies of the *nation*'—two representatives, whom the merchants of Istanbul had elected among themselves, and who normally cooperated with the ambassador in the internal administration of the community. Yet the deputies of the *nation*, two merchants named Bœuf and Pech, were explicitly forbidden to interfere in any political matters. This arrangement was kept until the arrival of a new official representative of the French state.⁶⁴

The question of who would represent France thus remained unresolved for a long time. Almost one year after Choiseul-Gouffier's recall, on 7 June 1793, Marie Louis Descorches, the first envoy of the French Republic, arrived in Istanbul.⁶⁵ Two weeks later a man named Hénin arrived; the republican government (fearing Descorches would not reach his destination) had appointed him chargé d'affaires to Istanbul. The Ottoman government, however, did not officially acknowledge either of them. The French Republic had to wait for another two years, until the summer of 1795, to have Descorches's successor Raymond Verninac recognized by the Sublime Porte as official representative of France.

⁶¹ This was the title assumed by the Count of Provence after his flight from France.

⁶² Smith to Grenville, 25 September 1797, TNA, FO 78/18, fol. 299.

⁶³ TNA, FO 78/14, fols. 72–8.

⁶⁴ Report of a meeting which the dragoman Dantan had with the *reis efendi*, 2 May 1793, MAE, CP Turquie 185, fols. 21–2.

⁶⁵ Marcère, *Une ambassade à Constantinople*, vol. 1, 32.

‘NO ONE AMONG US PAYS ANY ATTENTION TO THOSE
BADGES OF THEIRS’: THE OTTOMAN GOVERNMENT
AND THE REGIME CHANGE IN FRANCE

One of the many things that can be learnt from ambassadorial reports about the making of Ottoman foreign policy is that the Sublime Porte consulted the representatives of neutral states for their opinion on policy questions. At the end of the eighteenth century, the customs of European diplomacy had not yet become the ‘global’ norm. Nonetheless, when dealing with European diplomats, a basic knowledge of the European customs of diplomatic practice and international law was highly valuable, as European diplomats insisted on the universality of their interpretation of these customs.⁶⁶ It was, however, obvious to any observer that international law and the customs of diplomacy were construed in countless different manners. Thus, it became feasible for Ottoman government officials to ask (for example) the British ambassador, Robert Ainslie, for his opinion about the appropriate mode of conduct in the case of the arrival of Ambassador Sémonville. Ainslie later reported to his government:

[T]he reis efendi requested to have my opinion, most particularly respecting the reception of the minister from a new republic hitherto unacknowledged by any other power. As I had carefully avoided whatever interference in the measures lately recommended to the Porte, I of course now wished to elude mixing in its consequences, and indeed in any business consequent upon the rapid succession of the revolutions of France. In this intention, I sent through my principal dragoman, Mr. Pisani, a verbal and confidential answer to the reis efendi’s message avowing my total ignorance of the views attributed to the present rulers of France, which I could not suppose inimical to the Porte... As to M. Sémonville, I held it improbable, especially after what has happened, that he can be permitted to proceed hither in a public character until the certainty of his admission has been positively arranged, and should he arrive in a private capacity, or any other person be employed in negotiating that business, in either case His Excellency the reis efendi will have an opportunity of managing and settling things in the manner most convenient to the interests of the Porte; who in my opinion might in the actual crisis give umbrage to her great neighbours [Austria and Russia] by being the first and perhaps the only power who acknowledges the sovereignty of the new created French Republic.⁶⁷

Whether the advice of the British ambassador exerted any influence on the decision-makers within the Ottoman administration is hard to tell. The Ottoman government decided upon a pragmatic approach, not officially acknowledging the French Republic, but also not impairing its relations with its old strategic ally, France. This mode of conduct was in line with Ainslie’s suggestions, but it also

⁶⁶ See e.g. Christine Vogel, ‘Gut ankommen. Der Amtsantritt eines französischen Botschafters im Osmanischen Reich im späten 17. Jahrhundert’, *Historische Anthropologie*, 21(2) (2013), 158–78; Christian Windler, ‘Interkulturelle Diplomatie in der Sattelzeit. Vom inklusiven Eurozentrismus zur “zivilisierenden” Ausgrenzung’, in Hillard von Thiesen and Christian Windler (eds.), *Akteure der Außenbeziehungen. Netzwerke und Interkulturalität im historischen Wandel* (Cologne, 2010), 445–70.

⁶⁷ Ainslie to Grenville, 10 December 1792, TNA, FO 78/13, fols. 187–8.

suggested itself from an Ottoman perspective. Other neutral powers in Europe, such as Denmark, adopted a similar policy.⁶⁸ The Sublime Porte had, apparently, little ideological problems with regard to the regime change in France. The Ottomans may have seen the French Revolution as an internal rebellion and decided to side with whoever emerged victorious out of this struggle.⁶⁹ The Sublime Porte, it seems, had decided in favour of this strategy immediately after Choiseul-Gouffier was deposed. A few days later, on 12 December 1792, the first dragoman of the embassy, Joseph Fonton, had an audience with the *reis efendi*, who announced that the Ottoman government approved of the French community's decision to appoint a new representative. The *reis efendi* also declared to the dragoman that the Sublime Porte intended to adhere to all treaties it had concluded with the French monarchy: 'Although the existing treaties between the Porte and France were made with the [French] kings, they necessarily and directly concern the nation, since it is clear that two princes who contract together can have no other aim than the mutual benefit of their nation[s] . . .'⁷⁰

Many European diplomats who were sent to the Ottoman Empire—as well as the historians reading their reports—believed that the Ottoman government was notorious for its corruptibility, its abrupt changes of policies, and for the inconsistency of its decisions.⁷¹ The case of the Franco-Ottoman negotiations during the French Revolution presents much evidence to the contrary. One example is the Ottoman policy regarding the recognition of the French Republic. The consistent principle in this matter, which the Ottoman government followed in spite of all French overtures, was presented to the embassy's dragoman for the first time in December 1792: 'The Porte, which will certainly not be the last [power] to recognize the French Republic, cannot, however, recognize it as the very first; but it is necessary [for the Porte], and she even wishes, that another power gives her an example.'⁷² The Sublime Porte's policy decisions also concurred with another of the British ambassador's suggestions. Although the Ottoman government did not acknowledge the French Republic, it declared that Sémonville would not be rejected, provided he arrived in the Ottoman capital in a non-official capacity.⁷³

⁶⁸ Martine Rémusat, 'Un sans-culotte à la cour de Danemark', *Revue de Paris*, 19(4) (1912), 538–78, 542.

⁶⁹ Soysal, *Fransız ihtilâli ve Türk-Fransız Diploması Münasebetleri*, 102; Faruk Bilici, 'La Révolution française dans l'historiographie turque (1789–1927)', *Annales historiques de la Révolution française*, 63 (286) (1991), 539–49, 540; Hitzel, 'Les Echos de la Révolution française à Istanbul', 151.

⁷⁰ Report about a meeting between the *reis efendi* and Joseph Fonton, 14 December 1792, MAE, CP Turquie 184, fol. 75.

⁷¹ These notions were omnipresent in the different ambassadorial reports I consulted. See e.g. Report of Descorches, 9 August 1793, MAE, CP Turquie 185, f. 201; Descorches to Foreign Minister, 1 September 1793, MAE, CP Turquie 185, f. 284; 'Supplément d'instructions à l'ambassadeur sur le cérémonial de son ambassade à Constantinople', 2 March 1796, MAE, CP Turquie 193, fol. 191.

⁷² Report about a meeting between the *reis efendi* and Joseph Fonton, 14 December 1792, MAE, CP Turquie 184, fols. 76–77.

⁷³ Report about a meeting between the *reis efendi* and Joseph Fonton, 14 December 1792, MAE, CP Turquie 184, fol. 76.

Moreover, when in 1793, in the wake of the execution of Louis XVI, the Coalition of states waging war against France grew immensely,⁷⁴ the Ottoman government decided not to join this war but to declare Ottoman neutrality.⁷⁵ At this time, the same diplomatic coalition which had brought about the rejection of Sémonville started a number of new initiatives against the French republicans. At the beginning of April, the Austrian, Prussian, and Russian ministers at the Porte submitted a joint note, demanding the banning of revolutionary symbols and the closure of the French embassy building. This note deserves to be quoted at length here, because it is representative of the arguments and language used by the anti-French diplomats. They depicted French revolutionaries as scoundrels and anarchists. Allowing the French to express their affiliation with the Revolution was interpreted as 'evident bias' in favour of the regicides. The Coalition diplomats often used references to the actions of other European countries, as well as the necessity to join the common cause of all monarchies, to support their demands:

[It] is the French, the murderers of their king, the destroyers of all laws human and divine, . . . who . . . in defiance of [Ottoman] neutrality, dare to allow themselves . . . the most shameful excesses . . .

The Sublime Porte knows, no doubt, about these excesses. The tricolour cockade is worn as a sign of war; the so-called liberty tree⁷⁶ was impudently planted in the middle of the French embassy, without the permission of the Sublime Porte and despite the latter's impartiality towards the monarchy or the republic; [the French] insult during the most abominable orgies the sacred names of all sovereigns; their representatives are being publicly offended, night and day, by indecent songs and the most insulting speeches. Such is, for the past three months, the conduct of the French in this capital, sad fruit of the principles they parade and necessary result of the anarchy that reigns among them.

Since the Sublime Porte has officially made known that it has adopted a system of strict neutrality, the undersigned . . . , in the name of their courts, have the honour to request that it prohibits the wearing of the French cockade both in the capital and in the *échelles*. [The cockade] could be tolerated as long as it was still regarded an unequivocal sign of the opinions of those who wore it. But since the murder of His Majesty the Most Christian King it has become the *characteristic sign of revolt and regicide*. Honour and good policy no longer allow a foreign sovereign to tolerate it in his dominions, and the respectable French of Constantinople themselves ceased to wear it when the news of this horrible event was known.

But this remark about the cockade becomes even more important regarding the *tree of liberty*, this odious monument of sedition and perfidy, which, under the eyes of foreign diplomats, was planted across from an imperial palace⁷⁷—and this at a time when the weakest and most insignificant powers have strictly prohibited [such trees] in their

⁷⁴ In 1792 only Austria and Prussia were at war with France. In 1793 followed, inter alia, Britain, the Netherlands, Spain, Portugal, Sardinia, and Naples.

⁷⁵ Note of the Ottoman ministry to Antoine Fonton, 27 March 1793, MAE, CP Turquie 184, fol. 288.

⁷⁶ Liberty trees were either real trees or decorated poles (similar to maypoles), planted by supporters of the French Revolution as symbols of their new liberty.

⁷⁷ The Galatasaray palace school was neighbouring the French embassy.

states. The undersigned therefore ask insistently that the Sublime Porte will have the tree cut down without any delay, because, as long it remained standing, it would show an inconceivable tolerance and an obvious bias [on the part of the Sublime Porte], which would only fuel the hopes and the temerity of the French instigators.

[The undersigned] demand furthermore that the residence of the Ambassador of France should not be inhabited by anyone but a formally recognized minister and that it should not be profaned by serving as an asylum for the first villain who comes along.⁷⁸

The initiatives of the Coalition diplomats availed them very little. The only concession the Ottomans made was to demand that the first republican envoy to the Sublime Porte not reside in the French embassy palace; the embassy nevertheless served to accommodate virtually all other agents of the French government.⁷⁹

The Ottoman government apparently considered neither the tree of liberty nor the cockade as a threat to the political stability of the empire. This position is entirely understandable, considering that the vast majority of the Ottoman subjects were not familiar with these revolutionary insignia and the ideology they represented and thus also not attracted by it.⁸⁰ The Ottoman nineteenth-century historian Ahmed Cevdet recounted in a wonderful anecdote the Sublime Porte's response to the demanded empire-wide prohibition of the tricolour cockade:

One day the Austrian chief dragoman came to the *reis ül-küttab* Raşid Efendi and said: 'May God punish these Frenchmen as they deserve; they have caused us much sorrow. For heaven's sake—if only you would have those cockades stripped off their heads.' To this request Raşid Efendi replied: 'My friend, we have told you several times that the Ottoman Empire is a Muslim state. No one among us pays any attention to those badges of theirs. We recognize the merchants of friendly states as guests. They wear what headgear they wish on their heads, and attach what badges they please. And if they put baskets of grapes on their heads, it is not the business of the Sublime Porte to ask them why they do so.'⁸¹

Cevdet's account seems to reflect the Ottoman attitude towards revolutionary symbols very accurately. The Austrian archival sources corroborate his account. The Austrian dragoman's report of another meeting he had with Mehmet Raşid Efendi reveals once again the *reis efendi's* ironic undertone in his reaction to the Austrian, Prussian, and Russian demands regarding the cockade and the tree of liberty.

⁷⁸ Joint note of the Austrian, Russian, and Prussian representative, submitted to the Porte on 1 April 1793, quoted in Ignace de Testa (ed.), *Recueil des traités de la Porte ottomane. Avec les puissances étrangères...*, 11 vols. (Paris, 1865), vol. 2, 205. Emphases in original, except for the word *échelles*.

⁷⁹ Descorches to Foreign Minister, 8 August 1793, MAE, CP Turquie 185, fol. 125.

⁸⁰ Cf. Soysal, *Fransız ihtilâli ve Türk-Fransız Diploması Münasebetleri*, 101–2; on the detailed knowledge of the Ottoman government about the events in France and Europe, see Yeşil, 'Looking at the French Revolution through Ottoman Eyes'.

⁸¹ Ahmet Cevdet, *Vak'a-i devlet-i aliye-i osmaniye*, 12 vols. (Istanbul, 1869), vol. 6, 118–19, quoted in Lewis, 'The Impact of the French Revolution on Turkey', 119. On Cevdet, see also Wajda Sendesni, *Regard de l'historiographie ottomane sur la Révolution française et l'expédition d'Égypte. Tarih-i Cevdet* (Istanbul, 2003).

At this meeting, the *reis efendi* proposed that the French royalists should create and display signs of their own:

To destroy the accusation of partiality, he added to the usual refrain of the Porte's entire ignorance regarding the meaning of the cockades, of the [liberty] tree, etc., that, to put this to the test, . . . the royalist party [should] decorate themselves with another cockade, with other signs opposed to [those of the republican] faction; and if the Porte tolerated [these signs] with the same insouciance . . . it would seem to him that the problem was solved.⁸²

It was certainly not the alleged ignorance or tolerance of 'Frankish oddities' alone that induced Ottoman government officials not to intervene in the disputes over the cockade and other revolutionary emblems. The British ambassador explained the Porte's non-interference policy towards the revolutionaries by the legal protections and autonomy granted by the capitulations. In addition, he assumed that the Ottoman government underestimated the threat to the political stability of all countries that was emanating from revolutionary France:

It is . . . necessary to observe, that [due to the capitulations] the Ottoman ministers . . . have no right of interference in the immediate concerns of the Franks . . . This circumstance is the only apology for the Ottoman tolerance of a practice which could not be suffered in any other part of Europe, and it is only fair to add, that, independent of every political consideration, the Turks in general are still in the dark respecting the nature and importance of the disorders in France and that the Turkish police carefully abstains from mixing in disputes amongst the Franks unless they are of a nature to commit [affect] the public tranquillity.⁸³

The Coalition diplomats, however, hoped that insistence would finally lead to success and continued to pressure the Sublime Porte. The impending arrival of Descorches, the new republican envoy, prompted the Austrian, Prussian, and Russian ministers to start yet another diplomatic initiative. In addition to their earlier demands, the main aims this time were the rejection of Descorches and the expulsion of the republican Émile Gaudin, whom the allied diplomats portrayed as a dangerous agitator.⁸⁴ This attempt was as unsuccessful as the others before it. The Sublime Porte did not approve of the obstinacy of the three allied ministers. In his official verbal response, the *reis efendi* described the terms of the joint note as so disproportionate (*peu mesurés*) that the divan had decided not to lay it before the sultan.⁸⁵ The government would respond to the request only as a sign of goodwill, as the allied ministers' demands barely merited any attention. Raşid Efendi expressed the Ottoman government's suspicion that the three ministers either had no authorization for their joint representations or that they had not accurately

⁸² 'Extrait d'un rapport de M. de Wallenbourg à l'Internonce impérial et royal', 10 June 1793, HHStA, Diplomatisches Archiv, Türkei II, 103, June, fol. 91.

⁸³ Ainslie to Grenville, 25 January 1794, TNA, FO 78/15, fol. 16.

⁸⁴ Joint request of the Austrian, Russian, and Prussian representative, submitted to the Porte on 4 June 1793, quoted in Testa (ed.), *Recueil des traités de la Porte ottomane*, vol. 2, 206.

⁸⁵ Official Ottoman verbal response to the joint report of 4 June, 13 June 1793, HHStA, Türkei II, 103, June, fol. 98.

informed their governments about the Ottoman policy of neutrality. He therefore proclaimed that the Porte would inform the respective governments through other channels about the true state of affairs.⁸⁶ The allied ministers, it seems, had gone too far with their continuous advances. In a private conversation, the dragoman of the Sublime Porte acquainted his Austrian colleague with the Ottoman government's internal reactions to the joint requests:

The dragoman . . . assured me that finally everyone felt molested and embittered by the continued and daily pursuance of the affairs of France; that after so many avowals of the Porte, [declaring] never to treat with the rebels and not to change [its] peaceful policy, [they] were firmly convinced, especially some members of the divan [*conseil*] . . . that [the allied diplomats] were seeking to provoke the Porte, and that they wanted to compromise its honour . . .⁸⁷

Why then, [asked the dragoman of the Porte,] all these pursuits; why treat us like children or idiots; why always try to keep us on a short leash, to patronize, to lecture us; why not give us a few moments of respite to see how we will act on our own etc., etc.⁸⁸

The unfavourable reaction of the Ottoman government notwithstanding, the allied ministers continued their advances. About half a year later, the British ambassador reported that 'the Russian and Prussian missions . . . distinguish themselves by incessant complaints at the Porte against the French Jacobins, whom the Turks jocularly say they treat better in the field'.⁸⁹ Apparently, the allied ministers and their governments ignored the fact that such a strategy could compromise their standing at the Sublime Porte.⁹⁰

CONCLUSION

The end of the French old regime in the Ottoman Empire came belatedly, in 1792, but when it came, it led to an interruption of French diplomacy and a phase of political insecurity for the French expatriate communities in the Levant. The events leading to the 'interregnum' of French diplomatic representation in the Ottoman capital were closely connected to the political developments in Western Europe. The last ambassador of the monarchy, Count Choiseul-Gouffier, was not willing to accept any other master than the French king. When the French National Assembly began to interfere ever more strongly in the king's policies, Choiseul-Gouffier insisted on his loyalty to the monarch. After the flight to Varennes and the declaration of war against Austria, Choiseul-Gouffier saw it as his obligation to turn against the 'rebels' ruling

⁸⁶ Ibid.

⁸⁷ 'Extrait d'un rapport ultérieur de M. de Wallenbourg à l'Internonce', 14 June 1793, HHStA, Türkei II, 103, June, fol. 99.

⁸⁸ Ibid., fol. 101.

⁸⁹ Ainslie to Grenville, 10 January 1794, TNA, FO 78/15, fol. 11.

⁹⁰ Liston to Grenville, 19 March 1795, TNA, FO 78/16, fol. 47: '[T]he Austrian, and Prussian ministers lost much of their respectability by the frequency and vehemence of their representations to the Porte, on the subject of French affairs; because their remonstrances, too often applied to objects of a trifling nature, generally failed in their aim, and yet were not followed by any serious marks of disapprobation on the part of their courts.'

over his country. He started to play a double game to delay his recall and to impede the arrival of a new French ambassador. The connectedness of events in Paris and Istanbul played out in two directions: the case of Choiseul-Gouffier was, for instance, later used in the trial of Louis XVI. The dethroned king was accused of having had knowledge of his ambassador's treason.⁹¹

During the instability of the French diplomatic 'interregnum', between summer 1792 and summer 1793, no less than eight persons claimed to represent French interests in the Ottoman capital (Choiseul-Gouffier, Sémonville, Chalgrin, Fonton, Bœuf, Pech, Descorches, and Hénin). However, between the recall of Choiseul-Gouffier, in August 1792, and the arrival of Descorches, in June 1793, the French government in Paris had no reliable diplomatic representative in Istanbul and consequently had no influence on Ottoman policy decisions at the outbreak of the French Revolutionary Wars.⁹² Therefore, no negotiations with Istanbul could be opened until the summer of 1793, even though the French government urgently needed to win the Sublime Porte as an ally, as will be seen in Chapter 2.

The joint efforts of the anti-French diplomats in Istanbul notwithstanding, the Ottoman government decided not to take an inimical stance towards the French revolutionary government. Treaties which had been concluded with the French kings were now interpreted as binding for both 'nations'. Thus, the Sublime Porte maintained all privileges which had been granted to the French expatriate communities in the capitulations. Furthermore, by not prohibiting any revolutionary symbols, the Ottoman government respected the autonomy of French residents and granted them more freedom of expression than in almost any other place in Europe. One of the reasons for this Ottoman indulgence was certainly that, in contrast to other European states, the French Revolution was not considered a threat to the political stability of the Ottoman Empire.

The 'outbreak' of the French Revolution in the Ottoman Empire in 1792, therefore, is a very ambiguous phenomenon. For the great majority of Ottoman subjects, the events in France were barely noticeable. The French residents in the Ottoman Empire, however, were massively influenced by what was happening in their home country. Their relative autonomy, granted by the capitulations, strongly enhanced this state of affairs and thus facilitated the integration of the French expatriate communities into the translocal sphere of the French Revolution.⁹³

⁹¹ 'Convention nationale. Séance du mardi 11 décembre', *Moniteur universel*, No. 348, 13 December 1792.

⁹² On the new republic's difficulties in defining its diplomatic policies, see Virginie Martin, 'Diplomatie et République. Gageure ou impasse?', in Michel Biard et al. (eds.), *1792 Entrer en République* (Paris, 2013), 283–96.

⁹³ The consequences for the French residents in the Ottoman Empire will be shown in Part III of this study.

2

Negotiating for a Besieged Republic Franco-Ottoman Diplomacy in 1793

Tim Blanning, in his *Origins of the French Revolutionary Wars*, began his account of the French Revolution and international relations with 17 August 1787. On this day, the Ottoman Empire declared war on Russia and imprisoned the Russian emissary Bulgakov in the famous Seven Towers Castle.¹ The war between the Ottoman state, Russia, and soon after Austria ‘was to have unforeseen consequences in a dozen different countries . . . [and] exercised a profound influence on the French Revolution’.² The events of 1787–8, in combination with the financial crisis at home, led to the collapse of French old regime power politics in Europe.³

In 1792, as described in Chapter 1, the French Revolution ‘returned’ to the Ottoman Empire. The War of the First Coalition catapulted Istanbul onto the centre stage of European diplomacy: the Ottoman Empire was strategically the most important, and militarily the most powerful, neutral state that hosted diplomats from both the revolutionary and the counter-revolutionary side. For France in particular, the Ottoman capital became the principal diplomatic posting, after most French legations in other European capitals had to close down. While France’s diplomatic activities in most other states virtually ceased to exist, diplomacy in Istanbul became more important, as France, for the first time since the sixteenth century, tried to enter into a formal alliance with the Ottoman state.⁴

The role of revolutionary diplomacy was the focus of a controversy between two giants of the historiography of the French Revolution, Heinrich von Sybel and Albert Sorel. Sybel claimed that the French government in 1793 and 1794 had spent massive amounts of money on diplomacy and secret activities. According to

¹ The Seven Towers (Yediküle) was a fortress on the city walls of Istanbul. It was an Ottoman tradition to use this castle for the detention of diplomats from countries with which the Ottoman state went to war.

² Blanning, *The Origins of the French Revolutionary Wars*, 36. On the shifts in European power constellations during the Russo-Turkish War of 1787–92, see also Pascal Firges, *Großbritannien und das Osmanische Reich Ende des 18. Jahrhunderts. Europäische Gleichgewichtspolitik und geopolitische Strategien* (Annweiler, 2009), 88–96.

³ Jeremy J. Whiteman, *Reform, Revolution and French Global Policy: 1787–1791* (Aldershot, 2003), 101. See also Thomas E. Kaiser, ‘The Diplomatic Origins of the French Revolution’, in David Andress (ed.), *The Oxford Handbook of the French Revolution* (Oxford, 2015), 109–27.

⁴ For more on the sixteenth-century alliance, see Christine Isom-Verhaaren, *Allies with the Infidel: The Ottoman and French Alliance in the Sixteenth Century* (London, 2011).

him, the French used the same methods (of deploying all possible resources) in foreign affairs and in the war effort:

In the face of . . . numerous enemies the Committee of Public Safety was incessantly endeavouring to clear the way for its armies by diplomatic successes . . . While Carnot directed the military operations, these foreign affairs were presided over, with almost unlimited powers, first by Hérault de Séchelles, and then by Barère. [Both] departments of the government knew no scruple, no hesitation, no shrinking from any sacrifice, if it did but promote the great object in view. Both departments dipped deep into the property of the French nation, attained to great results, and saw immeasurable sums uselessly squandered by the baseness and imbecility of their agents.⁵

Sorel, who had better access to the French archives, raised justified doubts about Sybel's propositions. He concluded that in those years the French government's secret diplomacy had 'neither the organization, nor the importance, nor the character', which Sybel attributed to it.⁶ Sybel based his claims mainly on Prussian documents dealing with the French negotiations in Istanbul. One of the references Sybel quoted in support of his position was a report to the Committee of Public Safety, in which a French government agent in Istanbul claimed that he had made all necessary preparations to incite a popular uprising, if the Sublime Porte should refuse to declare war on Russia.⁷ My findings, set out in this chapter, confirm Sorel's doubts that the French government of the Terror had either the capacity to supervise or the means to fund as grand and extensive a scheme of secret diplomacy as suggested by the German historian.

This chapter and the next explore the persistent French efforts to negotiate a Franco-Ottoman alliance. These efforts continued for years, until finally they became strategically obsolete after the Peace of Campo Formio (1797). They were thus one of the most consistent foreign policy doctrines of revolutionary France. The first topic of this chapter is how the changes in the strategic aims of French foreign policy took shape during the Revolution. Next, the Ottoman perspective on the French overtures is considered, with an account of the course of Franco-Ottoman negotiations in 1793. The chapter ends with an examination of the obstacles which hampered the accomplishment of the first republican envoy's diplomatic mission.

REVERSING THE *RENVERSEMENT DES ALLIANCES*: POLITICS OF THE *ANCIEN RÉGIME*, POLITICS OF THE NEW REGIME

To understand the strategic considerations that shaped French foreign policy towards the Ottoman Empire during the French Revolution, it is necessary to go

⁵ Heinrich von Sybel, *History of the French Revolution*, 4 vols. (London, 1869), vol. 3, 324.

⁶ Albert Sorel, 'La Diplomatie secrète du Comité de salut public. Avant le 9 Thermidor', *Revue historique*, 10 (1879), 339–48, 348.

⁷ Heinrich von Sybel, 'La Propagande révolutionnaire', *Revue historique*, 11 (1879), 103–14, 111.

back to the middle of the eighteenth century. Until then, one of the constants of European power politics for more than two and a half centuries had been French rivalry with the House of Habsburg.⁸ This changed in 1756, when France and Britain 'switched' their traditional allies, Prussia and Austria, in the so-called Diplomatic Revolution or *Renversement des alliances*. In the subsequent Seven Years' War, France was allied with Austria against Britain and Prussia.⁹ The war developed into a geopolitical disaster for France, resulting in major losses in North America and India. One important result of the Diplomatic Revolution was that the French gave up their system of alliances with Sweden, Poland, and the Ottoman Empire, a system attributed to Cardinal Richelieu. For more than a century, this system of alliances, forming a counterweight to both Russia and Austria, had been the basis for French superiority on the European continent.¹⁰

After the *Renversement des alliances*, the relationship between France and the Ottoman Empire remained close, but it necessarily became strained whenever Austria went to war with the Ottomans. Thus, for example, France had sent a mission of military advisors to the Ottoman Empire in 1784, in order to support Ottoman efforts to modernize their army and navy. But when Austria joined Russia in the war against the Porte in 1788, the French had to withdraw their instructors.¹¹ Furthermore, when the French ambassador attempted to start a mediation, his foreign minister instructed him to take his orders directly from the Austrian chancellor, Prince Kaunitz.¹² To make things even worse, France had also signed a commercial treaty with Russia in 1787.¹³ This obvious bias weighed heavily on Franco-Ottoman relations and led, in conjunction with the financial crisis at home, to a collapse of French influence in the region.¹⁴ Ironically, the alliance with Austria did not reduce the anti-Austrian sentiments that existed in the French public. On the contrary, Austria was held responsible for the humiliation of the Seven Years' War, as well as for the continuously declining political influence of France in Europe. 'Austrophobia', which previously had been an elite phenomenon, became popularized after the beginning of the French Revolution.¹⁵ Austria was suspected

⁸ Blanning, *The Origins of the French Revolutionary Wars*, 41. For a concise overview of French foreign policy at the end of the eighteenth century, see Kaiser, 'The Diplomatic Origins of the French Revolution'.

⁹ Stone, *Reinterpreting the French Revolution*, 16.

¹⁰ Thomas E. Kaiser, 'La Fin du renversement des alliances. La France, l'Autriche et la déclaration de guerre du 20 avril 1792', *Annales historiques de la Révolution française*, 351 (2008), 77–98, 84; Orville, *The Diplomatic Retreat of France and Public Opinion on the Eve of the French Revolution*, 47.

¹¹ Pascal Firges, 'Gunners for the Sultan: French Revolutionary Efforts to Modernize the Ottoman Military', in Pascal Firges et al. (eds.), *Well-Connected Domains: Towards an Entangled Ottoman History* (Leiden, 2014), 171–87, 174; Hitzel, 'Une voie de pénétration des idées révolutionnaires', 89; Shaw, *Between Old and New*, 122.

¹² Kaiser, 'La Fin du renversement des alliances', 85.

¹³ Albert Sorel, *L'Europe et la Révolution française*, 8 vols. (Paris, 1887–1904), vol. 1, 302.

¹⁴ Orville T. Murphy, 'Louis XVI and the Pattern and Costs of a Policy Dilemma: Russia and the Eastern Question, 1787–1788', *Proceedings: Consortium on Revolutionary Europe*, 16 (1986), 264–74.

¹⁵ Kaiser, 'La Fin du renversement des alliances', 82; Thomas E. Kaiser, 'The Austrian Alliance, the Seven Years' War and the Emergence of a French "National" Foreign Policy, 1756–1790', in Julian Swann and Joël Félix (eds.), *The Crisis of the Absolute Monarchy. France from Old Regime to Revolution* (Oxford, 2013), 167–79.

of orchestrating an internal and external plot against the new regime.¹⁶ Ultimately, this led to the French declaration of war against Austria, on 20 April 1792. Now, the French revolutionaries proceeded to reverse the *Renversement des alliances*.

Hence, from a strategic perspective, the early years of the French Revolution produced a return to rather traditional patterns of French foreign policy, away from the 'new' alliance system of 1756. This change was endorsed by Foreign Minister Charles-François Dumouriez (in office from 15 March to 13 June 1792), who was also responsible for reorganizing and restaffing the French foreign ministry, as well as for recalling Ambassador Choiseul-Gouffier.¹⁷ One cornerstone of the new (and old) diplomatic system was the revival of the old alliance with the Ottoman state. Dumouriez had also opened negotiations with London and Berlin to secure a benevolent neutrality of both powers, but the declaration of war against Austria obstructed these efforts. The only diplomatic option that remained in Dumouriez's hands was what Albert Sorel has called 'the supreme remedy of the old diplomacy in desperate cases': he tried to provoke a diversion in the east by convincing the Sublime Porte to go to war with Austria and Russia.¹⁸

The man whom Dumouriez chose for this task was Ambassador Sémonville. The very first sentence of his instructions concerning the negotiations for a Franco-Ottoman alliance stated that this alliance was chiefly directed against Austria and Russia. Nevertheless, its true offensive character had to be obscured. France had officially ruled out offensive warfare in its fourth constitutional article: on 22 May 1790, the National Assembly declared solemnly that 'the French nation renounces the undertaking of any war with a view to making conquests and that it will never use its power against the liberty of any other people'.¹⁹ To declare the alliance offensive would, therefore, be inconsistent with French revolutionary principles.²⁰ However, an Ottoman attack on Austria and Russia was the obvious goal of the negotiations assigned to Sémonville. France would not consider this as a war of conquest, but as a war of compensation. Such a diversion would help both France and its traditional ally Poland. Since the end of the last war between the Ottoman Empire and Russia, the Russian Empress Catherine II had deployed her troops against the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth in a war that ended in the Second Partition of Poland.²¹

¹⁶ Kaiser, 'La Fin du renversement des alliances', 89.

¹⁷ Groc, 'L'Impossible Accord', 35; Patricia Chastain Howe, 'Charles-François Dumouriez and the Revolutionizing of French Foreign Affairs in 1792', *French Historical Studies*, 14(3) (1986), 367–90, 368. On French revolutionary foreign policy in general, see also Patricia Chastain Howe, 'Revolutionary Perspectives on Old Regime Foreign Policy', *Proceedings: Consortium on Revolutionary Europe*, 17 (1987), 265–75; Patricia Chastain Howe, *Foreign Policy and the French Revolution: Charles-François Dumouriez, Pierre LeBrun, and the Belgian Plan, 1789–1793* (Basingstoke, 2008).

¹⁸ Sorel, *L'Europe et la Révolution française*, vol. 2, 455.

¹⁹ Quoted in Blanning, *The Origins of the French Revolutionary Wars*, 79.

²⁰ Instructions to Sémonville concerning an alliance with the Ottoman Empire, 12 June 1792, MAE, CP Turquie 184, fol. 156.

²¹ *Ibid.*, fols. 156–7.

Sémonville was instructed to insinuate at the Sublime Porte that now was the perfect moment to take revenge for the humiliations of the previous wars. The most painful result of the last conflicts was the loss of suzerainty over the Crimea, following the Peace Treaty of Küçük Kaynarca in 1774. Unlike other territories, lost before 1774, the Crimea was mostly inhabited by Muslims. The Peace of Küçük Kaynarca dictated the independence of the Crimean Khanate. This independence, however, lasted only a few years until 1783, when Catherine II annexed the peninsula. Since then, regaining control over the Crimea had become a priority objective of Ottoman foreign policy.²² The French were willing to promise their support for a future peace treaty on the basis of Küçük Kaynarca, which meant a return to independence for the Crimea. It is, however, questionable whether anything other than the return of full Ottoman suzerainty over the Crimea would have been a tempting offer to the Sublime Porte.²³

The instructions given to Marie Descorches, the first republican envoy to arrive in Istanbul, were similar to those given to Sémonville.²⁴ Although the government had sent him to the Ottoman capital primarily to ensure Sémonville's accreditation at the Sublime Porte, the need for an Ottoman diversion had become so urgent that Descorches was instructed immediately to start negotiations about an alliance between the Ottoman Empire and the French Republic. The question whether this alliance should be defensive or offensive was now addressed in a much less equivocal fashion. Descorches was positively authorized to negotiate both a defensive and an offensive alliance, which Sweden and Poland were also invited to join. The plan was to create an alliance of all powers threatened by Russian or Austrian expansion. The French envoy was furthermore instructed to determine the kind of support the allies would give to each other (army, navy, and/or financial subsidies). The French were ready to promise not to conclude a separate peace until the Russians withdrew from the Crimea. To give more weight to his negotiations and to demonstrate the sincerity of the French proposals, Descorches was authorized to announce that a French squadron was at his disposal and ready to cooperate with the Ottomans as soon as the alliance was concluded. The envoy was furthermore expected to send agents to the Balkans and to the Caucasus to fuel rebellions against the Austrians and Russians.²⁵

The French government considered the successes of enemy propaganda as one of the main obstacles to successful negotiations with the Sublime Porte. According to Descorches's instructions, it was this 'libelling' of the new political order in France that had led to the refusal of Sémonville:

Absurd calumnies, presenting the French Revolution in the most odious way, have inspired prejudice at the Ottoman court, which seems to have been further aggravated

²² Shaw, *Between Old and New*, 25, 33.

²³ Instructions to Sémonville concerning an alliance with the Ottoman Empire, 12 June 1792, MAE, CP Turquie 184, fol. 158.

²⁴ Sorel holds that Descorches received the instructions intended for Sémonville. Furthermore, he considers them to be 'one of the most remarkable documents of republican diplomacy'. See Sorel, *L'Europe et la Révolution française*, vol. 3, 302–3.

²⁵ 'Mémoire pour servir d'instructions à Marie Descorches allant à Constantinople en qualité d'envoyé extraordinaire de la République française, près la Porte ottomane', Nantes, Centre des Archives diplomatiques (CADN), Constantinople, Ambassade, Série B3, unfoliated.

by the criminal conduct of the treacherous Choiseul: it is therefore [important] to destroy this prejudice, to thwart the intrigues . . . , and to remind the Ottoman ministry of arrangements that are more in line with our shared interests.²⁶

Descorches was expected to explain to the Ottoman government 'with persuasive eloquence'²⁷ the changes the French Revolution had brought about. The foreign ministry instructed him to emphasize the positive effects of the regime change in France and their benefits for Franco-Ottoman relations, especially the annulment of the treaty of 1756. He was also advised to point out that there was no danger that French political principles would spread to the Ottoman Empire:

The envoy of the French Republic shall take great care to reassure the divan, with regard to fears that might exist, that the system of liberty which the French nation has adopted will not propagate in the territories of the Grand Seigneur. The distance of these territories, the difference of language, character, the manners and the customs of the Muslims, and finally the little contact they have with the Europeans, will always be insurmountable obstacles to such propagation. The Turk is honest, loyal, and trusting, if he has no reason to believe that someone wants to deceive him. It is therefore with frankness and loyalty that we must fight his misconceptions [of the Revolution].²⁸

The government of the French Republic did not intend to revolutionize its potential ally.²⁹ To appreciate the full significance of Descorches's instructions, we must consider when they were drawn up. His credential letters are dated 27 December 1792, and it can be assumed that the foreign ministry drafted his instructions around the same time. This was during the period in which French war policies 'progressed from a war of prudence, to a war of propaganda, to a war of imperial expansion', as Blanning has pointed out.³⁰ The victories at Valmy (20 September) and Jemappes (6 November) had surprised the Coalition, and indeed all of Europe. They had enabled France to conquer Belgium. Now the expansion of the French borders to the Rhine became a viable option, and the solemn rejection of wars of conquest became just as obsolete as the Constitution of 1791 in which it was inscribed.

On 19 November 1792, the National Convention enacted a famous decree, promising 'fraternity and help to all peoples who wish to recover their liberty'.³¹ As the instructions given to Descorches make clear, the foreign ministry did not judge this declaration to have any significance for Franco-Ottoman relations, although the Ottoman state was, in the eyes of most Frenchmen, the epitome of a despotic state.³² Rebellions were to be incited, and the rights of man to be preached, solely on enemy territories, such as the Russian Caucasus or the Habsburg Balkans. In

²⁶ Ibid. ²⁷ Ibid. ²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ For more on revolutionary propaganda, see Chapter 6.

³⁰ Blanning, *The Origins of the French Revolutionary Wars*, 136.

³¹ Quoted in Doyle, *The Oxford History of the French Revolution*, 199.

³² On this topic see Asli Cirakman, 'From Tyranny to Despotism: The Enlightenment's Unenlightened Image of the Turks', *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, 33(1) (2001), 49–68; Adanir Fikret and Klaus Schneiderheinze, 'Das Osmanische Reich als orientalische Despotie

all other cases, the so-called propaganda decree of 19 November 1792 remained a 'dead letter'.³³

SELIM III'S BENEVOLENT NEUTRALITY: THE OTTOMAN PERSPECTIVE ON THE WAR OF THE FIRST COALITION

The Ottoman approach to the regime change in France was a pragmatic one, as Chapter 1 has shown. With regard to the negotiations about a possible alliance with France, the government of Selim III made no ideological difference between the old and the new regime. The Sublime Porte was, however, cautious not to provoke the anti-French Coalition by siding openly with the French.

For the Ottoman Empire, the end of the eighteenth century was a time of crisis. In the course of the century, Russia had grown to become the principal threat to the Ottoman state.³⁴ After several decades of peace, the war of 1768–74 turned into a veritable military catastrophe. It ended with the loss of the Crimea in the humiliating Peace of Küçük Kaynarca, which many historians regard as the beginning of the Eastern Question.³⁵ Owing to the Ottoman Empire's difficulties in competing with the modern standing armies of Austria and Russia, it became a potential candidate for partition.³⁶ The famous 'Greek Project' of Catherine II (r. 1762–96), to conquer Istanbul and create a new Greek Empire for her grandson Constantine, became the Russian goal in the following war (1787–92).³⁷ This war drove the Ottoman state so close to the brink of collapse that in 1789 Selim III had to have his gold and silver plate melted down and turned into coins, in order to pay his armies—and he ordered all Ottoman notables to do the same.³⁸ It is not improbable that only the outbreak of the French Revolution saved Istanbul from being

in der Wahrnehmung des Westens im 18.–19. Jahrhundert', in Elçin Kürşat-Ahlers (ed.), *Türkei und Europa. Facetten einer Beziehung in Vergangenheit und Gegenwart* (Frankfurt a. M., 2001), 83–122; Thomas E. Kaiser, 'The Evil Empire? The Debate on Turkish Despotism in Eighteenth-Century French Political Culture', *The Journal of Modern History*, 72(1) (2000), 6–34; Franco Venturi, 'Oriental Despotism', *Journal of the History of Ideas*, 24(1) (1963), 133–42; Windler, *La Diplomatie comme expérience de l'autre*, 364–6.

³³ Sorel, *L'Europe et la Révolution française*, vol. 3, 170. On the short life of this decree, see e.g. Schroeder, *The Transformation of European Politics*, 126.

³⁴ Malcolm E. Yapp, *The Making of the Modern Near East: 1792–1923* (London, 1991), 47.

³⁵ e.g. Matthew S. Anderson, *The Eastern Question: 1774–1923* (London, 1966).

³⁶ Christoph K. Neumann, 'Political and Diplomatic Developments', in Suraiya N. Faruqi (ed.), *The Cambridge History of Turkey: The Later Ottoman Empire, 1603–1839*, 4 vols. (Cambridge, 2006), vol. 3, 44–62, 57.

³⁷ Shaw, *Between Old and New*, 22–3.

³⁸ Ibid., 43. On the analogies between financial problems in France and in the Ottoman Empire, see Linda T. Darling, 'Public Finances: The Role of the Ottoman Centre', in Suraiya N. Faruqi (ed.), *The Cambridge History of Turkey: The Later Ottoman Empire, 1603–1839*, 4 vols. (Cambridge, 2006), vol. 3, 118–31, 130.

conquered by Russian troops. In any case, it definitely helped the Ottoman government to conclude peace on an almost status-quo basis.³⁹

The Ottomans, however, did not look on helplessly as Russian and Austrian armies conquered their territories. After the Peace of Küçük Kaynarca, the Ottoman government introduced a number of reforms to modernize the army and navy.⁴⁰ The French government supported these efforts by sending military instructors to Istanbul. French officers trained Ottoman gunners and, in 1784, a school for military engineers was founded, with tuition provided by both French and Ottoman instructors.⁴¹ Yet this cooperation ended abruptly in 1788, when Austria went to war with the Sublime Porte and France, obliged by the alliance of 1756, withdrew its specialists. The Sublime Porte took this obvious French bias badly. Ottoman esteem of the French was at its lowest point.⁴²

The outbreak of war between France and Austria and the overthrow of the monarchy did not cause much concern for the Sublime Porte, therefore. According to an anecdote, the grand vizier, upon hearing of the inauguration of the French Republic, declared: 'Well, that republic will at least not marry any daughters of the House of Austria.'⁴³ The end of the Bourbon monarchy's alliance with Austria also reopened the way for Franco-Ottoman cooperation. Sultan Selim III, who came to power only three months before the fall of the Bastille in 1789 and who defined himself a servant of the people, embarked on a radical reform programme resulting in a veritable revolution from above.⁴⁴ It is telling that the same term, *nizam-ı cedid* (New Order), which was used in Ottoman Turkish to refer to Selim III's reforming policies, was also used with regard to the new regime in France.⁴⁵ Tragically, this revolution from above too cost numerous lives, including that of the monarch himself. Selim III was killed, in 1808, after a janissary revolt against his new policies. Although his reforms were hampered by countless obstacles and failures, they can nonetheless be considered, in the words of Virginia Aksan, as a cornerstone for 'the survival and "rebirth" of the Ottoman Empire between 1760 and 1830, while the Muslim territories to the east in the Caucasus and south in Egypt and the Arabian Peninsula gradually succumbed to British or Russian influence'.⁴⁶

³⁹ Soysal, *Fransız ihtilâli ve Türk-Fransız Diplomasi Münasebetleri*, 101–2.

⁴⁰ Shaw, *Between Old and New*, 10.

⁴¹ Hitzel, 'Une voie de pénétration des idées révolutionnaires', 89. See also Mustafa Kaçar, 'Osmanlı Devleti'nde Bilim ve Eğitim Anlayışındaki Değişmeler ve Mühendishânelerin Kuruluşu', doctoral thesis (Istanbul Üniversitesi, 1996).

⁴² Soysal, *Fransız ihtilâli ve Türk-Fransız Diplomasi Münasebetleri*, 58–61; Salih Munir Pacha, 'Louis XVI et le sultan Sélim III', 39, 43. See also Firges, 'Grunners for the Sultan', 173–4.

⁴³ He was hinting at the marriage between Louis XVI and Marie Antoinette, a daughter of Empress Maria Theresa. Grosjean, 'La Mission de Sémonville à Constantinople, 1792–1793', 915; Soysal, *Fransız ihtilâli ve Türk-Fransız Diplomasi Münasebetleri*, 102.

⁴⁴ Yaycıoğlu, *Partners of the Empire*, 23.

⁴⁵ Yeşil, 'Looking at the French Revolution through Ottoman Eyes', 297. The term *nizam-ı cedid* was already in use at the end of the seventeenth century, signifying reforms. See Betül Başaran, *Selim III, Social Control and Policing in Istanbul at the End of the Eighteenth Century: Between Crisis and Order* (Leiden, 2014), 77.

⁴⁶ Virginia Aksan, 'Breaking the Spell of the Baron de Tott: Reframing the Question of Military Reform in the Ottoman Empire, 1760–1830', *The International History Review*, 24(2) (2002),

The central element of Selim's New Order was the modernization of the Ottoman military. The sultan undertook huge efforts to rebuild the navy, to improve the arms industry, and to create new infantry and artillery corps, trained and equipped after European models.⁴⁷ For the implementation of this ambitious programme, foreign expertise was very welcome. Even before the arrival of the first republican envoy in Istanbul, the Ottoman government had already used unofficial channels to send the French government a list of military experts the Sublime Porte would be happy to employ. By the end of 1792, Paris sent two naval architects and three craftsmen specializing in shipbuilding to support the construction of new Ottoman ships.⁴⁸ Artillery officers and military engineers arrived in early 1794.⁴⁹

The Ottoman sultan attached a great deal of importance to the foreign officers who were sent to train his new troops. Apparently he was also personally involved in drawing up the lists of specialists that the Sublime Porte requested from France.⁵⁰ Selim III met in person with French officers on different occasions and interviewed them about military instruction and exercises. He also wanted to know if the French would send more officers and ships. The sultan arranged for a very generous salary for the French officers.⁵¹ He also gave them his personal permission to wear the tricolour cockade openly, when training his new troops. However, he expected the French to wear Ottoman attire—a symbolic expression of loyalty. The officers complied and attached the cockade to their *kalpak*-hats.⁵² Working for the Ottoman sultan at a comfortable salary, instead of fighting and dying on the battlefields of Europe, must have been highly attractive to many French officers. Of about 600 foreign technicians employed by the Sublime Porte at any one time, half of them were Frenchmen.⁵³ In the archives, we find numerous requests from French officers to go to the Ottoman Empire as military advisors. For example, in 1794 a young general by the name of Napoleon Bonaparte applied to be attached to the Sublime Porte. Although in the end unsuccessful, his request prompted the French administration to draft instructions for his mission to Istanbul.⁵⁴ Ironically, when Bonaparte finally went to the Ottoman Empire, during the French invasion of

253–77, 277. It is somewhat ironic that, in the end, the Russian Empire collapsed a few years earlier than the Ottoman Empire (Russia in 1917 and the Ottoman Empire in 1923).

⁴⁷ A concise and thorough description of Selim III's military reforms can be found in Virginia Aksan, *Ottoman Wars 1700–1870: An Empire Besieged* (Harlow, 2007), 180–206.

⁴⁸ List of shipbuilders destined for Istanbul, 30 December 1792, MAE, CP Turquie 184, fol. 121. See also Appendix A.

⁴⁹ Descorches to Reis Efendi, 31 March 1794, MAE, CP Turquie 187, fol. 280.

⁵⁰ In July 1794, for example, he demanded through his *reis efendi* three engineers for the construction of fortresses, four founders of cannons, cannonballs, bombs, and mortars, as well as architects and craftsmen for the construction of a dry dock. Descorches to Commission of External Relations, 30 July 1794, MAE, CP Turquie 188, fol. 373.

⁵¹ Descorches to Foreign Minister, 25 April 1794, MAE, CP Turquie 187, fol. 436.

⁵² Thainville to Foreign Minister, 19 April 1794, MAE, CP Turquie 187, fol. 397. A *kalpak* is a traditional Turkic felt cap.

⁵³ Shaw, *Between Old and New*, 182.

⁵⁴ Draft decrees of the Committee of Public Safety, concerning Bonaparte's mission to the Ottoman Empire, MAE, CP Turquie 189, fols. 133–4; Édouard de Marcère, *Une ambassade à Constantinople. La politique orientale de la Révolution française*, 2 vols. (Paris, 1927), vol. 2, 41–2.

Egypt (1798–1801), he was defeated at the siege of Acre (in the north of modern Israel) by French-trained Ottoman artillerymen—the same artillerymen he could have been sent to drill a few years earlier.⁵⁵

The French revolutionary willingness to support Ottoman military modernization, and the fact that, since the reversal of the Treaty of 1756, France and the Ottoman Empire shared several strategic enemies, gained the revolutionary Republic the goodwill of both the Ottoman government and public.⁵⁶ A letter from a French observer, visiting Istanbul in 1794, to a friend who had lived there during the old regime, gives an impressive account of how the Ottoman change of attitude towards the French was perceived. It deserves to be quoted at length:

When a Frenchman passes through the streets of Constantinople, all eyes are set on his hat; if it is decorated with the tricolour cockade, the expressions of ‘dost’ (friend) [and] ‘kardeş’ (brother) accompany him everywhere; and you know the force of these words in their mouths; they [normally] employ them only among faithful Muslims.

We introduce ourselves to a group of Turks; they surround us [and] question us with interest; they offer us coffee [and] pipes . . . ‘aferin, aferin’ (courageous French; we pray to god twenty times a day for the success of your arms . . . you are our friends, our best friends etc. etc.)

In these last days, three or four of our cowardly émigrés went to a cafe. The Turks, always curious, asked them who they were. ‘We are French,’ they replied, ‘but not of the number of those French scoundrels who have murdered their sovereign . . .’ So our good Muslims distanced themselves from them . . . ‘fena, fena’ (bad, evil) they exclaimed, addressing the owner of the cafe; the owner made them leave, ashamed, by refusing to serve them.

[. . .]

These details seem insignificant to anyone who does not know the character of the Turks; but to you who has lived among them, who knows that under the old government a Frenchman could rarely walk in the streets of Constantinople without being insulted, [to you] this change of minds will seem astonishing, especially if we consider that it is generally felt by the entire nation. Judge for yourself what advantages we could gain from a people whose interests are so closely linked to ours and whose hatred is so to speak nationwide [*nationalisée*] against the Russians and the Austrians [*impériaux*].⁵⁷

Contemporary observers ascribed the Ottoman regard for the French revolutionary government to the French Republic’s enmity towards the ‘natural enemies’ of the Ottoman Empire, Russia and Austria. The War of the First Coalition gave the Ottomans a respite from the threatening pressure of its western and northern neighbours. It did not take much imagination to predict their long-term aspirations with regard to the Ottoman lands; a quick glance at the fate of neighbouring Poland

⁵⁵ Hitzel, ‘Les Relations franco-turques à la veille de l’expédition’, 49.

⁵⁶ Jamgocyan, ‘La Révolution vue et vécue de Constantinople (1789–1795)’, 463.

⁵⁷ ‘Extrait d’une lettre écrite de Constantinople’, 11 June 1794, MAE, CP Turquie 188, fols. 145–6. Unbracketed ellipses are in the original.

sufficed. The new Ottoman stance towards the French seems to have come into being during the diplomatic 'interregnum' before the arrival of the first French republican envoy—and thus at a time when no French diplomats were lobbying the Sublime Porte for the cause of the Republic. Still, in November 1792, Émile Gaudin, the pro-revolutionary tourist of Chapter 1, described the standing of the French republicans as precarious, because of the great influence of the anti-French diplomats who did everything to discredit the new regime in France: '[We are] painted here in the blackest colours, known only under the name of rebels or bandits . . . ; there is no one who wants to, or who can, demonstrate the falsity of these ridiculous and obnoxious allegations . . .'⁵⁸

Nevertheless, in May 1793, after the resignation of the provisional principal of the French *nation* and one month before the arrival of the envoy Descorches, when enemies attacked from all sides and revolutionary France seemed to be on the brink of collapse, the Austrian ambassador reported:

It is . . . apparent that the grandees of this empire do not see with pleasure the misfortunes and the disorders of the Jacobin armies, the rapid advancement towards a civil war, the league of so many powers united against the alleged Republic; because they apprehend that the affairs of France will be settled all too soon . . .⁵⁹

Selim III had a certain predilection for the French.⁶⁰ In the late 1780s, before his accession to the throne, the young prince had corresponded with Louis XVI.⁶¹ However, Louis's unwillingness to give full support to the Ottomans against their enemies disappointed Selim.⁶² According to the Prussian envoy, Selim was shocked at the news of the French king's execution on 21 January 1793.⁶³ On the other hand, the professed friendship of the French republicans and their war against common enemies did gain them, it seems, the sympathy of the sultan. When the French envoy Descorches submitted two diplomatic notes informing the Sublime Porte about the French war efforts, Selim commented in a handwritten note that he enjoyed seeing the success of the French armies.⁶⁴ A report of the Austrian ambassador confirms the sultan's benevolent stance towards the French. His account not only reveals Selim III's attitude towards the supporters and opponents of the French Republic, but also illustrates the sultan's curiosity and his readiness to

⁵⁸ Gaudin to Koch, 8 November 1792, Archivio di Stato di Venezia, Inquisitori di Stato, 930, quoted in Cessi, 'Émile Gaudin et la politique française à Constantinople en 1792, II', 66.

⁵⁹ Herbert to Thugut, 10 May 1793, HHStA, Türkei II, 103, May, fol. 5.

⁶⁰ Shaw, *Between Old and New*, 187.

⁶¹ Salih Munir Pacha, 'Louis XVI et le sultan Sélim III', 518.

⁶² Shaw, *Between Old and New*, 16–17.

⁶³ Johann Wilhelm Zinkeisen, *Geschichte des Osmanischen Reiches in Europa*, 7 vols. (Gotha, 1859), vol. 6, 858–9.

⁶⁴ *Hatt-ı şerif* (statement, written by the sultan himself) of Selim III, MAE, CP Turquie 186, fols. 322, 496. The first declaration reads: 'My vizier, brave French. I am pleased with their success.' The second one states: 'My vizier, I have seen with pleasure, the note of our friend Descorches, I am delighted and I wish for the arms of the French to prosper and to be always victorious over their enemies.' The French translations of these declarations, made by the dragoman Dantan, were not dated, but they were attached to Descorches's dispatch of 14 January 1794.

experiment with new forms of courtly representation that were foreign to Ottoman court culture:

In order to enjoy the spectacle of a ball, the Grand Seigneur gathered yesterday men and women of the Frankish nations with an orchestra of musicians. The ladies of the seraglio, hidden behind blinds, took part in this entertainment, which was new for them. Next to a Jacobin violinist in uniform and with a cockade one could see a royalist in civilian clothes. The wife of the Jacobin [was] among the dancers. The Grand Seigneur had a page ask this woman why she was not wearing the cockade like her husband; and another page asked the same question to the royalist musician. The latter, having declared that he was not of the party of those who had massacred their king, his response was not at all approved and he was told that the French may have done wrong by putting their sovereign to death, but that they were the friends of the Porte, and that they had committed themselves to return the Crimea [to the sultan].⁶⁵

It was not only the sultan and the Ottoman government who became increasingly benevolent towards France after the regime change. This change of attitude, it seems, also spread among large portions of the Ottoman population—at least, among those who had some knowledge of politics. After his arrival in Istanbul, the envoy Descorches remarked that the French republicans enjoyed among the ‘Turkish nation’ a favour which they did not enjoy anywhere else, not even in the United States.⁶⁶ An employee of the French foreign ministry, sent to Istanbul as courier, confirmed Descorches’s statement with his own experiences: ‘The unique amity, which I would say is general, that the Turks show at all occasions towards everything French allows no doubt that this is the national opinion [*expression nationale*], strengthened by the hatred they nurture against the Russians . . .’⁶⁷

The representative of the French monarchists, on the other hand, considered the professed friendship of the Ottomans towards the French republicans as an indicator of the successful revolutionary infiltration of Ottoman society:

I will give you a proof of the progress the poison of Jacobinism has made among the Turks . . . Three weeks ago, a young Turkish [navy] officer, . . . noticing . . . my white cockade on my hat, called me a rebel. I questioned him on the motive which had misled him. He replied that it was the opinion of all his friends, and his own, that the good and true French were those who wore the cockade with the three colours.⁶⁸

The diplomatic archives in London, Paris, and Vienna speak volumes about French popularity in the Ottoman Empire.⁶⁹ It must be stressed, though, that all these documents only reflect the experiences of their authors—mostly government

⁶⁵ Herbert to Thugut, 25 February 1794, HHStA, Diplomatisches Archiv, Türkei II, 106, January–March, fol. 251.

⁶⁶ Descorches to Foreign Minister, 1 September 1793, MAE, CP Turquie 185, fol. 280.

⁶⁷ Report by Sicard, 16 February 1794, MAE, CP Turquie 187, fol. 89.

⁶⁸ ‘Chalgrin to Flachslanden’, 16 December 1793, HHStA, Diplomatisches Archiv, Türkei II, 105, December, fol. 96.

⁶⁹ e.g. Ainslie to Grenville, 10 February 1794, TNA, FO 78/15, fol. 23; Liston to Grenville, 3 July 1794, TNA, FO 78/15, fols. 183–5; Herbert to Thugut, 10 October 1793, HHStA, Diplomatisches Archiv, Türkei II, 104, September, fol. 24; Henin to Foreign Minister, 28 September 1793, MAE, CP Turquie 186, fol. 42; Thainville to Commissaire of External Relations, 9 June 1794, MAE, CP Turquie 188, fol. 119.

agents—who were mainly in contact with Ottoman notables. There is, furthermore, some evidence that attitudes towards the French cause varied greatly depending on the religious affiliations of the Ottoman subjects. It is important to keep in mind that the Ottoman Empire was a multi-ethnic and multi-religious state. When eighteenth-century observers wrote about the ‘friendship of the Turks’, they were referring to Ottoman Muslims. Non-Muslims, except members of the Jewish community, were largely ‘fanaticized against the French Republic by their priests’, if we may believe the French envoy.⁷⁰ The French consul on the Peloponnese made similar observations for the Greek provinces. He held the Greeks to be mainly inimical to, while Ottoman Turks were generally much in favour of, the French.⁷¹

However, this high esteem enjoyed by the French did not induce the Sublime Porte to join the War of the First Coalition against France’s numerous enemies. When, in early 1793, Britain joined the war against France, it was foreseeable that the battles between their privateers and navies would also affect the Eastern Mediterranean, as this had been the case for a long time whenever the two states went to war with each other.⁷² This conflict could, thus, affect the Ottoman coasts. The Sublime Porte therefore issued a declaration of neutrality, stating that the Ottoman government would not accept any hostilities within 3 miles of its coastline.⁷³

Both belligerent powers frequently violated this rule, forcing the Sublime Porte to intervene. The Ottoman government was ready to go to great lengths to repair such infringements of their rules. When, for example, in July 1794 British ships captured the French frigate *Sybille* within the 3-mile zone, the Sublime Porte insisted on the ship’s restitution, via both the British ambassador in Istanbul and the newly appointed first permanent Ottoman ambassador in London.⁷⁴ Until

⁷⁰ Descorches to Commission of External Relations, 30 July 1794, MAE, CP Turquie 188, fol. 271. The conjecture that many members of the Jewish community were well disposed towards the French revolutionaries is affirmed by reports of the French royalist representative Chalgrin and British Ambassador Ainslie. The anti-Jewish tone of the respective statements (Ainslie, for example, speaks of the ‘Jacobins . . . [and] their brethren the Jews’) suggests however that this was mainly anti-Jewish libel (or anti-republican libel from people with an anti-Jewish *weltanschauung*) and without any real foundation. See Chalgrin to Flachslanden, 16 December 1793, HHStA, Türkei II, 105, December, fol. 96; Ainslie to Grenville, 10 February 1794, TNA, FO 78/15, fol. 23.

⁷¹ Bermond to Descorches, 9 August 1794, MAE, CP Turquie 188, fol. 406. On the Greek reaction to the French Revolution, see Richard Clogg, ‘The “Dhidhaskalia Patriki” (1798): An Orthodox Reaction to French Revolutionary Propaganda’, *Middle Eastern Studies*, 5(2) (1969), 87–115; Eugénie Kephallineon, ‘The Influence of the French Revolution on Pre-Revolutionary Modern Greek Poetry (1789–1821)’, *Études balkaniques*, 1 (1991), 61–74; Dimitri Nicolaidis, ‘La France et les Grecs sous la Révolution et l’Empire. Étude d’une représentation à l’échelle de peuples’, *Annales historiques de la Révolution française*, 63 (1991), 515–37.

⁷² Michael Talbot, ‘Ottoman Seas and British Privateers: Defining Maritime Territoriality in the Eighteenth-Century Levant’, in Pascal Firges et al. (eds.), *Well-Connected Domains: Towards an Entangled Ottoman History* (Leiden, 2014), 54–70.

⁷³ Note of the Sublime Porte to Antoine Fonton, 27 March 1793, MAE, CP Turquie 184, fol. 288.

⁷⁴ Raşid Efendi to Liston, 25 July 1794, TNA, FO 78/15, fols. 220–25; Yusuf Agah Efendi (the Ottoman ambassador in London) to Grenville, 5 September 1794, TNA, FO 78/15, fols. 255–7; Marcère, *Une ambassade à Constantinople*, vol. 1, 334–7; Mehmed Alaaddin Yalçinkaya, ‘The First Permanent Ottoman-Turkish Embassy in Europe: The Embassy of Yusuf Agah Efendi to London (1793–1797)’, doctoral thesis (University of Birmingham, 1993), 78–86. The establishment of permanent embassies in European capitals was a further result of Selim III’s reforms.

1798, the year of the French invasion of Egypt, the Sublime Porte continued to demand compensation for the British infringement of Ottoman neutrality.⁷⁵

On the other hand, the Ottoman government did for a time tolerate the fitting out of privateers in their own ports—a practice which, in the United States, had led to serious tensions between French Ambassador Genêt and President Washington and resulted in the American request for Genêt's recall.⁷⁶ In the Ottoman case, the French brought their prizes into the port of Izmir, where they had established a commission assessing the lawfulness of those prizes.⁷⁷ Owing to their lack of funds, French navy ships in the Eastern Mediterranean also used the money gained through privateering for essential provisions.⁷⁸ The fitting out of privateers in Ottoman ports was explicitly prohibited only after the British capture of the French frigate *Sybilie*. Privateers continued to infest Ottoman waters until the end of the war.⁷⁹

The scarcity of funds for the maintenance of a French navy squadron, anchoring in the port of Izmir, led to another proof of Selim III's goodwill towards the French. This squadron had originally been sent to Izmir to escort a convoy of French merchant ships. Owing to the capture of the harbour of Toulon and the British blockade of the French Mediterranean coast, the convoy could not return to France. Several hundred sailors were thus stuck on their ships and needed to be supplied. After the squadron ran out of funds, its commander demanded an advance from local French merchants. When this money was spent and the merchants declared themselves unable to support the ships any longer, it was even decided to sequester and sell the goods of French merchant ships in the harbour, which were waiting for the French navy to escort them back to France.⁸⁰ The continuing financial distress of the French squadron increased the risk of a mutiny. The state of affairs in Izmir was aggravated further because the maritime war caused the breakdown of French trade in the Eastern Mediterranean. Many sailors of merchant ships became unemployed and gathered in Izmir to wait for an opportunity to sail back to France. The French marine hospital of Izmir catered for these seamen, but cut off from the funds of the government, it ran out of money as well.⁸¹ The danger of a mutiny became so pressing and the financial prospects of the French in the Ottoman Empire so desperate that the French envoy had to turn

⁷⁵ The last of the many instances I found, where the affair was mentioned in the British archives, was a letter from İsmail Efendi (the second Ottoman ambassador in Britain) to Foreign Minister Grenville, dated 1 March 1798. See Kew, *The National Archives* (TNA), FO 78/19, fols. 56–7. The British did not restore the *Sybilie* to the French even though British Ambassador Liston had acknowledged the illegitimacy of the prize. See Liston to Grenville, 25 July 1794, TNA, FO 78/15, fol. 201.

⁷⁶ Harry Ammon, *The Genet Mission* (New York, 1973), 80–93.

⁷⁷ Descorches to Foreign Minister, 9 June 1794, MAE, CP Turquie 188, fol. 127.

⁷⁸ Descorches to Foreign Minister, 25 November 1793, MAE, CP Turquie 186, fol. 356.

⁷⁹ Translation of a *ferman* concerning Ottoman neutrality and maritime warfare, end of July 1794, MAE, CP Turquie 188, fol. 328.

⁸⁰ Declaration of the French merchants of Izmir, 14 September 1793, MAE, CP Turquie 185, fol. 399; Descorches to Foreign Minister, 25 October 1793, MAE, CP Turquie 186, fol. 220.

⁸¹ Descorches to Danton, 23 September 1793, MAE, CP Turquie 186, fol. 3.

to the Ottoman government to ask for a temporary loan.⁸² As can be imagined, this was humiliating for the French. For the Ottomans, however, it was an opportunity to demonstrate their sympathy and generosity towards a 'befriended nation'. In late 1793 and early 1794, the French received two loans amounting to 78,000 piastres.⁸³ Although the money was due after three months, and the French government had made elaborate plans on how to pay back the loans,⁸⁴ French legations continued to borrow from the Sublime Porte so that, in 1797, France owed 324,000 piastres to the Ottoman sultan.⁸⁵ The French also turned to the Ottoman government for another financial transaction. The republican government had decided to sell to the sultan, for a 'considerable sum', diamonds and jewellery belonging to the French crown, since, apparently, nobody else in Europe was willing to buy them—at least not at a reasonable price.⁸⁶

‘THE FRENCH GOVERNMENT IS NOT CONSOLIDATED
ENOUGH YET’: THE UNSATISFACTORY
COMMENCEMENT OF MARIE DESCORCHES’S
MISSION TO ISTANBUL

As we have seen, both the (politically informed) Ottoman public and the government were generally not opposed to the new republican regime in France: quite the contrary. However, this positive bias was not the only factor influencing the negotiations of the republican diplomats sent to Istanbul. The first one to arrive, Marie Descorches, travelled to Istanbul incognito, as merchant ‘Marie Daubri’, in order to make sure that the Sublime Porte would not reject him as it had Sémonville. Originally, he had planned to arrive in the Ottoman capital by April 1793.⁸⁷ However, his disguise was quickly unmasked. The Pasha of Bosnia required him to wait for two months in his capital Travnik until the Sublime Porte sanctioned the continuation of his journey, under the condition that Descorches would keep his false identity and that he would abstain from taking up residence in the French embassy palace.⁸⁸ On the other hand, the pasha assured Descorches of his government’s friendly intentions towards France: ‘[He told me] that the Porte has not

⁸² Descorches to Dantan, 23 September 1793, MAE, CP Turquie 186, fol. 4.

⁸³ Descorches to Foreign Minister, 24 October 1793, MAE, CP Turquie 186, fol. 213; Descorches to Reis Efendi, 18 January 1794, MAE, CP Turquie 186, fol. 487.

⁸⁴ Descorches to Foreign Minister, 27 March 1794, MAE, CP Turquie 187, fol. 267; Report to the Committee of Public Safety, 6 October 1794, MAE, CP Turquie 189, fol. 55.

⁸⁵ Kahraman Şakul, ‘An Ottoman Global Moment: War of Second Coalition in the Levant’, doctoral thesis (Georgetown University, 2009), 70.

⁸⁶ Descorches to Committee of Public Safety, 23 March 1795, MAE, CP Turquie 190, fol. 348.

⁸⁷ On his voyage to Istanbul, see Pierre Doyon, ‘Un diplomate français sur la route de Constantinople en 1793’, *Revue d’histoire diplomatique*, 97 (1931), 33–62.

⁸⁸ Descorches to Foreign Minister, 23 March 1793, MAE, CP Turquie 184, fol. 277; Descorches to Foreign Minister, 8 August 1793, MAE, CP Turquie 185, fol. 125.

ceased and will never cease to be the faithful and sincere friend of France; by which [the Porte] understands the French nation, regardless of its government . . .'⁸⁹

Descorches finally arrived in Istanbul at nightfall, on 7 June 1793, where he was warmly welcomed by members of the French community. He later compared the atmosphere among the French that evening to that of a ship's crew, which, after having been hit by a storm for a long time, finally managed to enter a safe port.⁹⁰

At first, the new envoy did not object to the Ottoman request to preserve his incognito, 'since it could help us to hide from the eyes of the public the important issues [i.e. the alliance negotiations] that we could negotiate while we made the others believe that I was still working towards the admission of my public character'.⁹¹ Descorches's hopes for an immediate start to negotiations were dashed. The Ottoman government was sensitive to the diplomatic pressure of the anti-French Coalition and wanted to avoid a further deterioration of relations with those courts. In insisting on Descorches's incognito, the Sublime Porte hoped to refute the allegations that it was willing to tolerate emissaries of the French 'rebels' on its territory. A few days after his arrival, the envoy was advised to keep a low profile. The *reis efendi* declared to Descorches's dragoman that he wanted to wait a little, to 'damp down the fire' in the diplomatic community, before any talks could be arranged.⁹²

It took a whole month until the French envoy had his first meeting with an Ottoman government official. Moreover, Selim III decided that Descorches should not meet with the *reis efendi*, but only with the controller of customs (*gümruk emini*), who was a less prominent member of the administration, and with the secretary of the *reis efendi*. At this conference, the envoy presented his credentials and confirmed that he was authorized to negotiate and sign any agreement that would be in the interest of both countries.⁹³ He explained that his mission's three objectives were: to inform the Ottoman government that republican France would provide more loyal and solid in its relations to other states than the old regime; to rectify false reports on the French Revolution; and to declare 'that the disastrous Treaty of Versailles, by which the perfidy of our ministers had sacrificed, in 1756, both [Ottomans and French] to the interests of the House of Austria, had been smashed by national indignation'.⁹⁴ Descorches went on to explain that the French nation would now turn to its natural friends, willing to form an alliance with the Ottoman Empire to support the Sublime Porte in re-establishing the Ottoman borders on the basis of the Treaty of Küçük Kaynarca.⁹⁵ The meeting ended quickly, as the controller of customs was not authorized to answer Descorches's communication, but only to relay it to the sultan. The French envoy had to wait for another month to meet the same Ottoman officials again, to receive the government's answer:

Your proposals are very pleasing to the Sublime Porte. It would wish to be able to accept the alliance you offer, but it seems that the French government is not yet

⁸⁹ Descorches to Foreign Minister, 8 August 1793, MAE, CP Turquie 185, fol. 124.

⁹⁰ Ibid., fol. 125.

⁹¹ Ibid., fol. 126.

⁹² Ibid., fol. 126.

⁹³ Report on the conference of 6 July 1793, MAE, CP Turquie 185, fol. 143.

⁹⁴ Ibid., fols. 144–5.

⁹⁵ Ibid., fol. 146.

sufficiently consolidated, and, besides, [the Porte] fears it would violate the neutrality it has adopted . . . But do not doubt that, as soon as the French nation has a fixed and stable government, the Sublime Porte will be eager to publicly declare the sentiments which are most certainly in its heart.⁹⁶

The Ottoman official continued by declaring that the Porte was not yet ready for a new war, but that the Ottomans were making preparations. He therefore asked Descorches if it was possible to arrange the dispatch of further military specialists from France. Descorches replied he could see no use in keeping his incognito if the Sublime Porte was not ready to enter negotiations for an alliance. Consequently, he demanded his recognition as official representative of the French Republic. The controller of customs replied that he had no instructions on this issue and that he was therefore not able to respond to this request.⁹⁷

This was the unsatisfactory outcome of the first attempt of an agent of the French Republic to form an alliance with the Ottoman Empire. All that the republican envoy had achieved was his acceptance by the Ottomans as a contact person for the new French government and for the French communities in the Levant. However, the Sublime Porte did not even officially recognize Descorches as a diplomat. Descorches concluded that in order to leverage the negotiations, France had to demonstrate that it was capable and willing to support the Ottoman state militarily: 'If we want [the Ottomans] to act more rapidly, we have to realize that it is not sufficient to hold out a vigorous hand from a distance; we must make them feel it; vessels in the Aegean, they are the true vehicle; there is no other.'⁹⁸

It is doubtful whether a French fleet alone, cruising in the Aegean Sea, would have induced the Sublime Porte to engage in serious negotiations over an alliance with France in the summer of 1793. From the Ottoman perspective, it made perfect sense not to enter into an alliance with a country that was at war with virtually the whole of Europe and suffering from a civil war. It was not the manoeuvrings of the anti-republican diplomats in Istanbul that impeded any progress of the French negotiations, but mainly the setbacks of the republican government at home. The fortunes of war had shifted against France: the revolutionary armies had fought successfully after the Battle of Valmy (20 September 1792), but with the beginning of the campaigning season of 1793 came the most perilous phase of the whole war for the young Republic. The French came under attack on all frontiers; they had to withdraw from Belgium and from the Rhineland. And, even worse, there were serious anti-government revolts in the country, notably in the south (Lyon, Marseille) and in the west (Vendée).

News of the loss of important fortresses at the French border and the revolt in Marseille reached Istanbul by the end of August 1793.⁹⁹ As if that was not bad enough, the enemies of the Republic spread false news about the Venetians joining

⁹⁶ Minutes of the conference of 8 August 1793, MAE, CP Turquie 185, fol. 153.

⁹⁷ Ibid., fol. 156.

⁹⁸ Descorches to Foreign Minister, 8 August 1793, MAE, CP Turquie 185, fol. 130.

⁹⁹ Condé fell on 10 July, Mainz was given up on 23 July, and Valenciennes surrendered on 28 July. The news reached Istanbul about a month later.

the anti-French Coalition. Descorches observed: '[It] is not difficult to observe that in their friendship, the good Ottomans are alarmed about us, and that anxiety is the prevailing feeling in their soul.'¹⁰⁰ Almost every new courier that arrived in the Ottoman capital from Western Europe brought tidings of fresh catastrophes for the French. Rumours began that Descorches was now actually negotiating for asylum for the French Jacobins who would soon have to flee their country.¹⁰¹ The government in France responded to the deadly threats of summer 1793 internally with the implementation of policies that came to be known as the Terror, and externally with total war.¹⁰²

However, the republican government decided not to modify its strategy towards the Ottoman Empire. After 2 June, the *Montagnard* Deforgues replaced the *Girondin* Lebrun as minister of foreign affairs.¹⁰³ On 8 August 1793, the new foreign minister wrote to Descorches that the Austrians had captured Ambassador Sémonville. Therefore, he charged Descorches to conclude the alliance negotiations alone and to ensure that the Ottomans would join the war: 'It is important for the success of the negotiations, that you bring them to a favourable end as soon as possible. I have nothing to add to the instructions that were given [to you] by my predecessor.'¹⁰⁴ The Committee of Public Safety, which effectively ruled the country, decreed only one modification with regard to Descorches's negotiations. In October 1793, it decided that the envoy should focus on turning the Ottomans against Austria. Given the Republic's current state of crisis, it was much more urgent to create a diversion to weaken this main enemy to the east than to fight Russia, which had not actively entered the war.¹⁰⁵

Meanwhile, at the beginning of September, Sémonville's baggage, which had been transported by sea, arrived in Istanbul, prompting the anti-republican diplomats to send yet another joint request to the Porte. This time they demanded the seizure of Sémonville's effects, on the grounds that the 173 boxes contained mostly jewellery and other objects which were the property of the French crown.¹⁰⁶ The Ottoman government, however, decided not to interfere. The dragoman of the

¹⁰⁰ Descorches to Foreign Minister, 25 August 1793, MAE, CP Turquie 185, fol. 255.

¹⁰¹ Herbert to Thugut, 25 July 1793, HHStA, Türkei II, 103, July, fol. 95.

¹⁰² Stone, *Reinterpreting the French Revolution*, 161.

¹⁰³ Montagnards and Girondins were two political groups during the French Revolution. The members of both groups were democratic republicans. The Montagnards were the more radical group. In the assemblies, they had taken their seats on the highest benches. Hence, they were referred to as the Mountain (*Montagne*). Their most prominent leader was Robespierre. The Girondins were named after the department Gironde in south-west France, as many of their deputies came from this region. They were also referred to as *Brissotins*, after their spokesman Brissot. They were the driving force behind the declaration of war against Austria, in April 1792. Around this time and until the spring of 1793, they dominated national politics. However, when the Revolution radicalized further, they were overthrown by the Montagnards, at the end of May 1793, and most of their prominent leaders executed. From this time onwards, Robespierre and his Montagnard partisans dominated national politics, drafted the most democratic Constitution of the Revolution, and were responsible for organizing the Terror.

¹⁰⁴ Foreign Minister to Descorches, 8 August 1793, MAE, CP Turquie 185, fol. 158.

¹⁰⁵ Extract from the registers of the Committee of Public Safety, 11 October 1793, MAE, CP Turquie 186, fol. 101.

¹⁰⁶ Descorches to Foreign Minister, 18 September 1793, MAE, CP Turquie 185, fol. 415.

Porte pointed out to the envoy of Naples that if the Porte sequestered these goods, 'in order to be consistent, [one] would also have to order the seizure of the [French] frigates and everything else that could be supposed to have formerly belonged to the monarchy'.¹⁰⁷

On 23 September 1793, three and a half months after his arrival in Istanbul, Descorches finally received an invitation to meet with the *reis efendi*. This meeting, however, had to take place in great secrecy and not at the usual venue for diplomatic meetings at the Bosphorus village of Bebek. Descorches and his dragoman Dantan first took a boat from Galata to the country house of the dragoman of the Sublime Porte, situated on the European side of the Bosphorus. Here Dantan left the boat, in order not to compromise the confidentiality of the meeting, since everybody in the *reis efendi*'s entourage knew that Dantan was the interpreter of the French legation. The dragoman of the Sublime Porte and Descorches crossed the Bosphorus to Üsküdar, where the *reis efendi* had his residence.¹⁰⁸ Upon his arrival, the *reis efendi* greeted Descorches with the words 'welcome, mister engineer', to mask his guest's identity. The meeting started with coffee, sweets, and the usual gestures of Ottoman hospitality. During the conference, the *reis efendi* gave his assurances of sympathy for the French republican cause. He praised the Franco-Ottoman friendship:

which is so natural... that the differences of religion, of manners, [or] political revolutions have never disrupted these ties;... We are convinced that the republican government that is established [in France] is the one which is most suitable for the common good in our political relations, as well as for your own wellbeing.¹⁰⁹

Although the *reis efendi* thus paid lip service to the 'natural friendship' with France, the Revolution notwithstanding, he also declared that the Porte could not risk a new war with Russia and Austria and was therefore not able to recognize Descorches in an official capacity.¹¹⁰ Once more, the hope of a swift conclusion of the alliance proved illusory. The negotiations had not progressed since the arrival of Descorches and they would not progress until the new regime in France had proved its resilience on the battlefields of Europe.

ORGANIZATIONAL DIFFICULTIES: PERSONNEL, MONEY, AND COMMUNICATIONS

The unpromising future of the French new regime was not the only impediment hampering the performance of the first republican envoy and obstructing the speedy success of his negotiations. In addition, Descorches had to deal with great difficulties caused by the internal chaos in his legation, in the department of foreign affairs in Paris, and in the French administration at large. The general

¹⁰⁷ Herbert to Thugut, 10 September 1793, HHStA, Türkei II, 104, September, fol. 48. The same Ottoman argument can be found in a letter from Descorches to Foreign Minister, 18 September 1793, MAE, CP Turquie 185, fol. 415.

¹⁰⁸ Descorches to Foreign Minister, 26 September 1793, MAE, CP Turquie 186, fol. 19.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid., fol. 20.

¹¹⁰ Ibid., fol. 21.

administrative disorganization of revolutionary France, caused by the large-scale replacement of experienced personnel, radical institutional reform, and the alteration of almost every administrative process, greatly complicated the efficient conduct of diplomacy.¹¹¹

One of the most pressing problems at the French legation in Istanbul was the absence of experienced employees. While previous (and subsequent) French diplomats in the Ottoman capital could draw on a well-organized body of secretaries and interpreters, Descorches had to work with a very small and inexperienced team. Most members of staff, especially those who represented the professional backbone of the French legation, had resigned before his arrival. It was the lack of interpreters, in particular, which hampered the performance of the French legation. All but one of the four dragomans had defected from their service in the spring of 1793, following the execution of the French king.¹¹² The only dragoman who stayed loyal to the new regime, Dantan, had no experience in diplomatic affairs, since he was only a junior member of the corps of dragomans.¹¹³ The other dragoman on whom Descorches relied was Mathieu Pusich,¹¹⁴ a man from Dubrovnik (Ragusa), who had been dismissed by the Prussian legation.¹¹⁵

No one among Descorches's staff was familiar with negotiating at the Sublime Porte; almost as detrimental was the fact that no one had good personal connections to high-ranking and influential Ottoman officials. Descorches vainly requested the prompt delegation of an experienced dragoman, such as the interpreter of the French foreign ministry, Ruffin.¹¹⁶ The envoy tried to compensate for this deficiency by opening informal channels to the Ottoman administration with the help of well-connected sympathizers of the Revolution, such as the American-born merchant John Humphrys,¹¹⁷ the Polish-Jewish physician Marco Calman,¹¹⁸ and the Armenian dragoman of the Swedish legation, Muradgea d'Ohsson, who had excellent connections to the Porte.¹¹⁹ Descorches also attempted to form a new corps of dragomans by establishing what he called 'our little *lycée*', a house where a

¹¹¹ On the French foreign ministry during the Revolution, see Masson, *Le Département des affaires étrangères pendant la Révolution*.

¹¹² See Chapter 7.

¹¹³ 'Mémoire remis, sur sa demande, au ministre des relations extérieures, par Marie Descorches', 24 January 1796, MAE, MD Turquie 15, fol. 174.

¹¹⁴ His name was transcribed in many different versions. In today's Croatian transcription, it would probably be Mateo Pušić.

¹¹⁵ 'Mémoire remis, sur sa demande, au ministre des relations extérieures, par Marie Descorches', 24 January 1796, MAE, MD Turquie 15, fol. 173.

¹¹⁶ Henri Dehérain, *La Vie de Pierre Ruffin, orientaliste et diplomate*, 2 vols. (Paris, 1929), vol. 1, 9–10, 81.

¹¹⁷ Descorches to Foreign Minister, 14 January 1794, HHStA, Türkei II, 106, April–May, fol. 188. (Letter intercepted by the Austrians.)

¹¹⁸ Descorches to Commission of External Relations, 30 July 1794, MAE, CP Turquie 188, fols. 371–2.

¹¹⁹ On Ohsson, see Onnik Jamgocyan, 'I.M. d'Ohsson. Un arménien au service de la diplomatie ottomane', in Daniel Panzac (ed.), *Histoire économique et sociale de l'Empire ottoman et de la Turquie (1326–1960). Actes du sixième congrès international tenu à Aix-en-Provence du 1er au 4 juillet 1992* (Paris, 1995), 619–29.

handful of students learned Ottoman Turkish.¹²⁰ Despite the importance of such an establishment, the French envoy could not afford to create a larger institution to train new dragomans.

The severe lack of funds for the legation in Istanbul and the consular network became a central obstacle for successful diplomatic representation in the Ottoman Empire. The war and the British blockade of French Mediterranean ports led to an interruption of the French establishments' conventional financial supply chains. In peacetime, the French administration in the Levant maintained itself through the circulation of bills of exchange between the French merchant communities and the chamber of commerce (later the provisional bureau of commerce) in Marseille.¹²¹ When French merchants sold goods in the Ottoman Empire, they received Ottoman piastres. They used this money to pay for the expenses of the French diplomatic and consular establishments in the Levant. For this service, they received letters of exchange drawn on the chamber of commerce in Marseille, a French government agency that acquitted these bills. The Marseille chamber of commerce did not pay the French merchants in the Ottoman Empire, but the trading houses in Marseille to which the merchants belonged. By this means, the French merchants avoided the inconvenience of shipping back the profits of their trade in cash. The system functioned as long as there was a profitable French trade in the Eastern Mediterranean. However, during the War of the First Coalition, which interrupted French trade, the merchants periodically ran out of cash.¹²² Moreover, the disorder in the provisional bureau that had replaced the chamber of commerce led to the contestation of the French envoy's letters of exchange, and this situation was remedied only by the direct intervention of the foreign minister.¹²³

Another problem in this context was the disadvantageous exchange rate for French currency, especially for the *assignats*, the paper money of the French Revolution. Even though the French government soon decided to pay its agents in the Levant in specie, the high prices and the low conversion rate reduced the salaries of French officials to such a degree that they could not make a living, or could not maintain a lifestyle appropriate to their status.¹²⁴ When, for example, the French consul at the Dardanelles was obliged to send home his only servant, and then his janissary guard, it not only made life more inconvenient for him, but also affected his personal safety and harmed his reputation. This, in turn, diminished his ability to protect French interests vis-à-vis the local authorities.¹²⁵ To maintain a good relationship with the Ottoman ruling elites, it was not enough for the consul to keep up an honourable state. The exchange of presents was also deemed

¹²⁰ Descorches to Commissaire of External Relations, 19 March 1795, MAE, CP Turquie 190, fol. 316.

¹²¹ Faivre d'Arcier, *Les Oubliés de la liberté*, 66–7, 70–1.

¹²² Descorches to Foreign Minister, 10 November 1793, MAE, CP Turquie 186, fol. 286; the French merchants of Istanbul to Descorches, 2 February 1795, MAE, CP Turquie 190, fol. 147.

¹²³ Foreign Minister to the bureau of commerce of Marseille, 2 October 1793, MAE, CP Turquie 186, fol. 69.

¹²⁴ Descorches to Foreign Minister, 1 September 1793, MAE, CP Turquie 185, fol. 290; Descorches to Foreign Minister, 10 October 1793, MAE, CP Turquie 186, fol. 92.

¹²⁵ Bermont to Descorches, 12 October 1793, MAE, CP Turquie 186, fol. 105.

indispensable: '[Our financial] distress is detrimental to our standing among the locals and to the indispensable benevolence of the Turkish officials, [who are now] deprived of the donations through which we gained their goodwill.'¹²⁶

To improve the precarious financial situation of the French establishments in the Levant, the foreign ministry planned to require government agents, travelling to Istanbul, to carry with them gold and bills of exchange, drawn on various banks and trading houses from neutral or even enemy cities such as Genoa, Geneva, Basel, Frankfurt, or Vienna. This would enable the French administration in the Ottoman Empire to receive money from foreign bankers.¹²⁷ Yet, for various reasons, government funds in significant amounts arrived very slowly. As a result, by October 1794, the Republic owed 78,000 piastres to the Ottoman sultan, 45,000 piastres to the French merchants, and one or two years' salary to almost all of its agents in the Levant. This, however, seemed only a small part of the Republic's debt in the Ottoman Empire, since nobody knew exactly how many outstanding accounts the French state had to acquit.¹²⁸ Probably an extreme case was that of the French consul in Baghdad, Jean-François Rousseau, who received no money from his government in four years.¹²⁹

The financial troubles were in part caused, in part aggravated, by the bad communications between France and the Ottoman Empire. Two main lines of communication linked Istanbul with Paris during times of peace: a fortnightly courier rode overland from the Ottoman capital to Vienna, from where there was a connection to the European postal network.¹³⁰ The other option was to send dispatches to Izmir, from where they were forwarded by the next merchantman heading for Marseille. Both connections had become unsafe during the War of the First Coalition. From 1793 onwards, the British blockade of the French Mediterranean coast, and later the capture of the French naval base at Toulon, produced a severe disruption of overseas communications with the Ottoman Empire. Even neutral ships sailing to Italian ports were not safe from being searched for goods, letters, and passengers coming from or going to France. As a result, the French government even considered sending agents destined for Istanbul by ship from one of the Atlantic ports of France, around Gibraltar into the Mediterranean.¹³¹

For postal communication, the connection with Istanbul via Vienna was a viable option and many Frenchmen in the Ottoman capital corresponded with their kin at home by using the Austrian mail. The Austrians were not able to intercept all letters to or from France, because the French sent them through neutral intermediaries who would then forward the correspondence. The French envoy, for instance, asked his superior to send him regularly the newspaper *Moniteur universel* in two sealed

¹²⁶ Descorches to Foreign Minister, 25 April 1794, MAE, CP Turquie 187, fol. 442.

¹²⁷ Report on how to send funds and personnel to Algiers, Tunis, and Istanbul, 1 December 1793, MAE, CP Turquie 186, fol. 367.

¹²⁸ Report to the Committee of Public Safety, 6 October 1794, MAE, CP Turquie 189, fols. 57–8.

¹²⁹ Rousseau to Descorches, 31 August 1794, MAE, CP Turquie 188, fol. 510.

¹³⁰ Groc, 'La Traduction, clef de la diplomatie révolutionnaire à Constantinople', 335.

¹³¹ Report on how to send funds and personnel to Algiers, Tunis, and Istanbul, 1 December 1793, MAE, CP Turquie 186, fol. 366.

envelopes, the first one addressed to a Citizen Bourelly, the second one to Monsieur Achard & Co., a Genoese merchant company. The French envoy remarked that even the Genoese intermediaries ought not be able to recognize the origin of the dispatch and that the letters should not bear any recognizable seals.¹³² A spy, working for the Austrians, even speculated that the French envoy received bills of exchange to fund his negotiations via the Vienna post.¹³³ The Austrians, however, frequently opened letters to and from Istanbul.¹³⁴ Hence the Vienna route was not suitable for official correspondence. The irregularity and insecurity of the communication with France was a great inconvenience for the French residents in the Ottoman Empire. At times, only anti-French sources provided news from the battlefields of Europe—a circumstance which was deemed disadvantageous for the reputation of France, for surely French sources would have shed a much more favourable light on the performance of the revolutionary armies (see Chapter 6).¹³⁵

The French envoy tried, therefore, to establish a regular courier service between France and the Ottoman capital via a very small corridor of neutral territories running through Switzerland, Venice, and Bosnia.¹³⁶ The administration in Paris, however, failed for a long time to endorse this plan. Only after Descorches's recall did the French government take the decision to establish this vital courier service.¹³⁷ Yet, even this route through neutral territory could not provide full security for official dispatches, as became blatantly obvious when, in spring 1794, the Austrians went so far as to capture a French messenger in Ottoman Bosnia.¹³⁸

The lack of qualified personnel, of sufficient funds, and of a safe line of communication with France, can be blamed partly on the inability of the central government in Paris to provide substantial help and guidance to its officials in the Ottoman Empire.¹³⁹ The internal disorder and the political purges, which affected experienced members of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, had grave results for the diplomatic mission in Istanbul. During the tenure of Foreign Minister Lebrun, a banker in Istanbul received 236,000 livres in letters of exchange, payable to Ambassador Sémonville. When, after 31 May 1793, the foreign ministry was purged of Girondin sympathizers and Lebrun was imprisoned, the sums sent to the Ottoman capital were forgotten.¹⁴⁰ It was not until summer 1794 that the

¹³² Descorches to Commissaire of External Relations, 13 October 1794, MAE, CP Turquie 189, fol. 89.

¹³³ Maret to Herbert, 24 September 1794, HHStA, Türkei II, 107, July–September, fol. 444. On Citizen Maret, the spy, see Chapter 6.

¹³⁴ Groc, 'La Traduction, clef de la diplomatie révolutionnaire à Constantinople', 335.

¹³⁵ Thainville to Foreign Minister, 19 April 1794, MAE, CP Turquie 187, fol. 396.

¹³⁶ Instructions for Marc Bruère, 9 August 1793, MAE, CP Turquie 185, fols. 216–19. The exact route ran from Paris to Basel and Chur, then via the Valtelline valley to Edolo on Venecian territory, from there via boat to Šibenik or Split and then through Bosnia to Istanbul.

¹³⁷ Report to the Committee of Public Safety on the communication between Paris and Istanbul, MAE, CP Turquie 189, fol. 137.

¹³⁸ Descorches to Reis Efendi, 10 March 1794, MAE, CP Turquie 187, fols. 162–3.

¹³⁹ See Chapter 4.

¹⁴⁰ Lebrun and four other members of the ministry were executed during the Reign of Terror. Masson, *Le Département des affaires étrangères pendant la Révolution*, 283.

government took measures to reclaim the money and to place it at the French envoy's disposal.¹⁴¹

Owing to the French Republic's state of emergency, the chaos in its administration, and also decisions taken by the Committee of Public Safety, the foreign ministry was not able to fulfil even its most basic functions, such as regular correspondence with its diplomats abroad. Descorches, for example, often did not receive official letters from Paris for months, which led him to complain bitterly to his wife: 'They leave me in the pleasant position of working like a galley-slave and receiving not a single line of direction or relief.'¹⁴²

A good example of the detrimental results of the vacillation in the direction of foreign affairs was the mission of Citizen Étienne-Félix Hénin.¹⁴³ In May 1793, when it became clear that Descorches had been halted in Bosnia, the French government ordered Hénin, then chargé d'affaires in Venice, to hasten to Istanbul in order to prepare for the arrival of Sémonville.¹⁴⁴ When Hénin reached the Ottoman capital, on 24 July 1793, he learned that Descorches had arrived there a few weeks earlier. Notwithstanding the fact that his mission had thus become obsolete, Hénin decided to stay in Istanbul to monitor the conduct of the French envoy, which inevitably led to a long and bitter conflict between the two.¹⁴⁵ It is not difficult to imagine that such a state of affairs made no good impression on the Ottoman government. By sending two envoys, who were obviously not cooperating with each other, and who were both claiming to represent the republican government, the French confirmed all reports about the anarchy and instability of the revolutionary regime. Moreover, the French government, although it had already decided to recall Hénin in December 1793, did not communicate this decision until May 1795, the time when Descorches was also replaced, for Hénin's surveillance was deemed useful to ensure Descorches's loyalty.¹⁴⁶ Thus, the French government's reluctance to act led to the peculiar situation that the envoy's unnecessary substitute remained in the Ottoman capital for almost two years. In addition, since the government was not able to provide the necessary funds for salaries, the French envoy saw no alternative but to pay the government's agents in Istanbul partly out of his own pocket (the larger part being advanced from the French merchants). These agents included Hénin, who served as nothing but a nuisance to Descorches's administration. The French envoy complained to his wife:

I have to do everything on my own . . . , even the pecuniary supply of this vast [administrative] machine [comes] from my personal credit . . . This is how time passes from grievance to grievance. It is terrible . . . [And with regard to Hénin:] If I was [at

¹⁴¹ Commissaire of External Relations to Thainville, 4 June 1794, MAE, CP Turquie 188, fol. 87.

¹⁴² Descorches to his wife, 10 September 1793, MAE, CP Turquie 188, fol. 75.

¹⁴³ On Hénin, see Berthier, 'Istanbul sous la cocarde révolutionnaire en l'an II'; Hitzel, 'Étienne-Félix Hénin, un jacobin à Constantinople'. See also Chapters 7 and 8 of this volume.

¹⁴⁴ Berthier, 'Istanbul sous la cocarde révolutionnaire en l'an II', 99.

¹⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 100.

¹⁴⁶ 'Extrait des registres du Comité de salut public', 16 December 1793, MAE, CP Turquie 186, fol. 426; Hénin to Committee of Public Safety, 1 May 1795, MAE, CP Turquie 191, fol. 34; Commissaire of External Relations to Committee of Public Safety, 21 July 1794, MAE, CP Turquie 188, fol. 323.

least] assisted here and not tormented by this snake that was sent to me and that I am nourishing in my bosom, I would breathe more easily.¹⁴⁷

The case of Hénin notwithstanding, the French government was neither entirely inactive nor completely unwilling to support the negotiations in Istanbul. Both the foreign ministry and the Committee of Public Safety were disposed to improve the conditions for Descorches's diplomatic mission. On 11 October 1793, the Committee of Public Safety decreed that the envoy should receive 4 million livres for turning the Ottomans against Austria.¹⁴⁸ This was a large sum, considering that, for example, the total yearly budget of the foreign ministry had been fixed at 6.3 million livres in 1790.¹⁴⁹ Yet, for the implementation of the decree, those 4 million livres had to be secretly sent in specie to Switzerland, or to other foreign places, to be converted into bills of exchange, and then brought to Istanbul. For all these transactions, middlemen were necessary to conceal the operation.¹⁵⁰ Because of these obstacles the money was ultimately never sent to the Ottoman Empire, and Descorches rightly complained about his state of abandonment: 'The remedy is announced to me; but for hungry stomachs, citizen minister, we need something more than just good news.'¹⁵¹

CONCLUSION

Let us return to the discussion between Albert Sorel and Heinrich von Sybel. The German historian had claimed that French diplomacy was organized as vigorously as the French armies were, and based his argument on—among other things—a report of Saint-Just, who was a member of the governing Committee of Public Safety. In this report, Saint-Just criticized the two government agents in Istanbul, Hénin and Descorches, for having wasted 70 million livres without receiving a formal alliance in return. They were, therefore, traitors, he argued, meriting the guillotine.¹⁵² This document later turned out to be a contemporary forgery, intended as a libel against the French government.¹⁵³ Although Sybel entertained some doubts about the accuracy of the amounts of money stated in Saint-Just's report, he did not call into question the dimension of the sums spent on diplomacy.¹⁵⁴ However, as discussed earlier, the French government was not even able to send sufficient funds to the Ottoman Empire for the maintenance of the French legation and the consular network, so that the French envoy had to solicit the Sublime Porte for financial support.

¹⁴⁷ Descorches to his wife, 11 December 1793, MAE, CP Turquie 188, fol. 76.

¹⁴⁸ Extract from the registers of the Committee of Public Safety, 11 October 1793, MAE, CP Turquie 186, fol. 101.

¹⁴⁹ Degros, 'La Révolution', 352. The actual expenses of the foreign ministry were, however, much lower after the outbreak of the Revolutionary Wars, owing to the closure of most diplomatic establishments.

¹⁵⁰ 'Rapport sur les fonds à faire passer en pays étranger et nommément à Constantinople', 17 December 1793, MAE, CP Turquie 186, fols. 428–31.

¹⁵¹ Descorches to Foreign Minister, 25 April 1794, MAE, CP Turquie 187, fol. 442.

¹⁵² Sybel, 'La Propagande révolutionnaire', 108.

¹⁵³ Albert Mathiez, 'Un faux rapport de Saint-Just', *Annales révolutionnaires*, 8 (1916), 599–611.

¹⁵⁴ Sybel, 'La Propagande révolutionnaire', 108–9.

Sybel's misinterpretation was apparently also influenced by his examination of the reports of anti-French diplomats, who generally overestimated the French government's abilities to undercut the policies of all other states in Europe. Some examples of these diplomats' exaggerations will be found in Chapter 6. Thus, when modern historians deplore the fact that, for reasons of economy, we are today not able to consult as many sources as our colleagues of the nineteenth century did,¹⁵⁵ we can at least console ourselves with the thought that knowledge of a large number of sources does not necessarily safeguard us from misjudging them.

As this chapter has demonstrated, the Ottoman government was far from being inimical towards the new regime in France. However, the French advances towards an alliance came at a bad time. Had the alliance system of 1756 been reversed a bit earlier, in 1790 or 1791, the conclusion of an alliance with the Ottoman Empire might have been an easy task, the Sublime Porte still being at war with Austria and Russia. But the reversal of the Diplomatic Revolution of 1756 took shape only after the three empires had concluded peace. Moreover, the French government was not even able to start negotiations for a Franco-Ottoman alliance at the beginning of the War of the First Coalition. For over a year, from the outbreak of the war in April 1792 until June 1793, the French government had no reliable diplomatic representative in Istanbul, who could work towards an alliance. Therefore, by the end of 1792, the foreign ministry considered these negotiations to be the most challenging assignment in French diplomacy.¹⁵⁶

When Marie Descorches finally arrived in the Ottoman capital, the strategic position of the French Republic had weakened so considerably that a Franco-Ottoman alliance seemed to make little sense to the Sublime Porte. Why should the Ottoman Empire take the side of a country in which all political structures were in a state of dissolution, a country fighting against virtually the whole of the rest of Europe—in short, a country which, in all probability, was the next candidate for dismemberment? The chances of successfully concluding his diplomatic mission in 1793 were, therefore, very small for the first French republican envoy. The reluctance of the Ottoman government would slowly yield only when the Republic proved that it was able to win the war against its enemies, as Chapter 3 will show.

What did not change for Descorches was the inability of the central government in Paris to offer adequate support to its envoy in Istanbul. Descorches continued to be left on his own, without direction and without sufficient funds. How could successful negotiations be conducted, if the negotiator could not afford the costs related to them? '[One] can neither go far, nor [act] boldly, when one always sees the bottom of one's coffer.'¹⁵⁷

¹⁵⁵ Tim Blanning did so with reference to Ranke and Sybel. Blanning, *The Origins of the French Revolutionary Wars*, ix.

¹⁵⁶ Instructions for Sémonville, end of 1792, MAE, CP Turquie 184, fol. 176.

¹⁵⁷ Descorches to Foreign Minister, 25 April 1794, MAE, CP Turquie 187, fol. 437.

3

Negotiating for a Victorious Republic

Franco-Ottoman Diplomacy 1794–1798

The previous chapter showed how the overtures of the besieged French Republic failed to persuade the Ottoman government to join the War of the First Coalition. This chapter will explore Franco-Ottoman diplomacy between 1794 and 1797, a time when the fortunes of war shifted decidedly in favour of the French—but also a time when the dismemberment of the Polish state posed a serious threat to both Ottoman and French interests in Eastern Europe. The changing strategic situation in Eastern Europe and the strength of the French Republic made a Franco-Ottoman alliance more desirable for the Ottomans. The French, however, who proved in 1794 that they were able to fight a war successfully against nearly all of Europe, began to realize that a weak ally might become more of a liability than a help. The Ottoman government wished to avoid engaging in a military confrontation with the enemies of France, and so attempted to initiate the mediation of a general peace in Europe, before allying with the French. After the failure of this attempt, Ottoman and French officials in Istanbul negotiated a defensive alliance, which was approved by the sultan in 1796, but rejected by the French government. Negotiations over an alliance treaty were half-heartedly continued until shortly before Napoleon Bonaparte's army invaded Ottoman Egypt in 1798. By then, the victorious French Republic had developed into an expansionist state, and the rich provinces of the Ottoman Empire presented a convenient opportunity for French imperialist aggrandizement. The invasion of Egypt, the very first direct military confrontation in history between France and the Ottoman Empire, is where this account ends. Before considering what led to this turning point, this chapter will first survey the activities of the three republican diplomats sent to Istanbul before 1798, whose mission it was to establish closer ties and an extensive strategic cooperation between revolutionary France and the monarchic Ottoman Empire.

‘MAKING AN ELEPHANT RUN LIKE A HARE’: MARIE DESCORCHES'S DIPLOMATIC MISSION (1794–5)

The disastrous strategic position of the French armies in the summer of 1793 had improved a great deal by the end of the year. The rebellions in the south of France were put down and punished with enormous brutality. The siege of Toulon with its naval base, the most important military harbour in the French south, was vital for

regaining control of the French Mediterranean coast. During this siege, which ended in the recapture of the city on 19 December 1793, a young artillery captain named Bonaparte was promoted to the rank of brigadier general.

The stabilization of the overall military situation of the Republic, achieved through an unheard-of mobilization of national resources, gave rise to new hopes for the French envoy's negotiations in Istanbul. In a dispatch from January 1794, Descorches reported that the Ottomans had already unofficially recognized the Republic: '[The] recognition of the Republic . . . is in their hearts; it exists *de facto*, because [the Ottoman government] communicates with me; it is business as usual, as if I had an official character.'¹

Descorches considered the Ottomans to be very much in favour of an alliance, but fearful that they would not be able to win a war against both Russia and Austria: 'They all sense the usefulness of this alliance, they desire it, [even] more than us, so they say; but to conclude it now would mean to declare war and their situation does not allow them to expose themselves to that yet.'² Furthermore, the Sublime Porte was apprehensive that the British would consider a Franco-Ottoman alliance as an act of hostility. The new directives from the Committee of Public Safety, ordering Descorches to focus on an Ottoman attack on Austrian territory only, did not facilitate his assignment: 'The Turks are almost indifferent towards Austria [*l'Allemagne*] . . . , as only Russia is of interest here; this is where all Turkish desires and fears lie.'³ Despite the professed desire for a Franco-Ottoman alliance, the general position of the Ottoman government had not changed: there would be no official recognition of the French Republic until another great power set a precedent, and no interference in the War of the First Coalition.

The French envoy, however, had to report some achievements to his government. As an ex-noble he was automatically under suspicion of being a potential traitor, so he must have felt a lot of pressure to show some positive results from his work. In France, the life of ex-nobles had become increasingly difficult as the Revolution went on, especially during 1793 and 1794. Descorches was a former marquis with family estates in rural Normandy. During the year 1793, the tenants living on his lands burned his family archives and, pointing a pistol at the estate administrator's throat, demanded that he pay back the rent collected by Descorches's ancestors. Some of the villagers also took possession of the envoy's lands. Rumours spread that he had emigrated. Neither he nor any of his family members dared to reclaim ownership of the lands until summer 1795.⁴ Since the spring of 1793, more and more voices in France had demanded the exclusion of ex-nobles from all public offices; and indeed, an increasing number of ex-nobles lost their posts during the Terror.⁵ At the end of 1793, the Committee of Public Safety

¹ Descorches to Foreign Minister, 14 January 1794, MAE, CP Turquie 186, fol. 498.

² Ibid.

³ Descorches to Foreign Minister, 10 February 1794, MAE, CP Turquie 187, fol. 61.

⁴ Descorches' wife to Committee of Public Safety, 25 August 1795, MAE, CP Turquie 191, fol. 323.

⁵ Patrice Higonnet, 'Aristocrats', in Samuel F. Scott and Barry Rothaus (eds.), *Historical Dictionary of the French Revolution*, 2 vols. (Westport, 1985), vol. 1, 22–5, 23–4.

decided to exclude all former noblemen from diplomatic functions.⁶ The French envoy, however, belonged to the relatively small number who stayed in office, because they had been requisitioned by the government for special purposes. Nevertheless, as an ex-noble diplomat, he was the 'perfect suspect'.⁷

From this perspective, it is understandable that Descorches tried so persistently to convey the impression that the Ottoman government was just about to declare itself in favour of the Republic. Being unsuccessful was dangerous for him, as it substantiated the suspicion that he was a traitor to the Revolution. Consequently many, if not most, of his letters contain phrases such as this: 'One cannot, citizen minister, be witness of everything that happens here, without being more and more convinced every day that the Turks are seriously considering ending their lethargy. It seems that our success electrifies them.'⁸ In fact, the negotiations made very little progress for a long time. At one meeting with the French dragoman, the *reis-ül-küttab* Raşid Efendi remarked about the French dealings with the Sublime Porte: '[M. Descorches] should please consider that the Porte is an elephant, which one cannot force to run like a hare . . .'⁹

During the spring of 1794, it was not only the strategic landscape of Western Europe that changed dramatically. While France launched an offensive into the Rhineland and Belgium, Eastern Europe seemed to witness another revolutionary eruption from March onwards. In Poland, an uprising began under the leadership of Tadeusz Kościuszko, a veteran of the American Revolution, attempting to reverse the results of the First and Second Partition (1772 and 1793). The Polish insurgents had close ties with the French republicans. 'Tricolour cockades sprouted everywhere, Polish translations of the "Marseillaise" and "Ça ira" appeared, and a "Society of Friends of the National Insurrection", which everyone recognized as a Jacobin club, was established.'¹⁰ The government in Paris, however, did not send any help to Poland. By November 1794, the Russian army had brutally captured Warsaw. Poland ceased to exist as an independent state for more than 120 years, but it may have saved the French Revolution by creating a diversion in the east and by pulling Prussia out of the war with France.¹¹

While the French government supported the Polish insurrection ideologically, but not with any troops or materiel, its envoy in Istanbul did everything in his power to assist the Polish struggle. Descorches, who had been French envoy in Warsaw before he was sent to the Ottoman capital, had excellent connections with the leaders of the Polish insurrection and tried to organize support for their cause

⁶ Report to the Committee of Public Safety about the legation in Istanbul, 5 May 1794, MAE, CP Turquie 187, fol. 492. On the decision of the Committee of Public Safety, see also Martin, 'La Diplomatie en Révolution', vol. 2, 480–1.

⁷ Martin, 'La Diplomatie en Révolution', vol. 2, 482.

⁸ Descorches to Foreign Minister, 10 March 1794, MAE, CP Turquie 187, fol. 160.

⁹ Descorches to Foreign Minister, 27 March 1794, MAE, CP Turquie 187, fol. 271. The French envoy found this remark to be so characteristic of his negotiations that he included it in the final report on his mission. See Report by Descorches, 24 January 1796, MAE, MD Turquie 15, fol. 175.

¹⁰ Doyle, *The Oxford History of the French Revolution*, 207.

¹¹ Cf. Banning, *The French Revolutionary Wars*, 134–7.

in Istanbul.¹² The French government hoped for an Ottoman intervention on behalf of the Polish insurgents. 'This seems to be of the least importance and will lead to everything.'¹³ The Ottoman reaction to the war in Poland was considered the touchstone for what could be expected of the Ottoman willingness to pursue a more active foreign policy, as Poland and the Ottoman Empire shared an interest in stopping Russian expansionism.¹⁴ Descorches urged the Sublime Porte in vivid terms to seize the opportunity to defend its interests at a moment when Sweden and Denmark were arming, the discontent in Russia might lead to another uprising, the Prussian army was retreating, and France was constantly victorious:

And yet you would still hesitate! And you would keep an equivocal attitude towards the French Republic! And her minister would continue an obscure role in Constantinople; reduced to an indecent incognito! What am I saying? You would miss the most beautiful moment that there has ever been for your empire! You would run the risk of never finding again . . . this active and powerful assistance which our loyalty and our desire for your well-being have offered you through my voice!¹⁵

The Sublime Porte, however, decided not to intervene. The last war against Russia and Austria (1787–92) had shown clearly enough that the Ottoman Empire was not yet ready to engage successfully in modern European warfare. The process of military modernization was still at its very beginning in 1794. According to an estimate of the British ambassador, Russian troops would need only a few weeks to gain control over all the lands north of the Danube, if a war were to break out.¹⁶ The Ottoman government thus decided to keep its system of neutrality so long as the military modernization process was incomplete.¹⁷ French overtures never received an outright rejection, but the Ottoman officials systematically delayed any reaction to them. One republican government agent summarized the Ottoman response to the French advances, using the bit of Turkish he had learned: 'some ifs . . . some buts . . . and the eternal *bakalım* (we will see . . . we will examine)'.¹⁸

Archival documents from Paris show that the French government became more and more dissatisfied with this Ottoman attitude towards a possible alliance. A strategy paper, written after 9 Thermidor (27 July 1794), emphasized that it should be made clear to the Porte that the more successful and powerful the Republic became, the less interested the French government would be in an alliance with the Sublime Porte. The Ottoman government, therefore, should lose no more time by procrastinating and further delaying the negotiations.¹⁹ The French

¹² Descorches to Foreign Minister, 9 June 1794, MAE, CP Turquie 188, fol. 126.

¹³ Report to the Committee of Public Safety about the legation in Istanbul, 5 May 1794, MAE, CP Turquie 187, fol. 495.

¹⁴ Commissaire of External Relations to Descorches, 5 July 1794, MAE, CP Turquie 188, fol. 250.

¹⁵ Descorches to Reis Efendi, 11 May 1794, MAE, CP Turquie 187, fol. 542.

¹⁶ Liston to Grenville, 2 July 1794, TNA, FO 78/15, fol. 177.

¹⁷ Descorches to Commission of External Relations, 30 July 1794, MAE, CP Turquie 188, fol. 368.

¹⁸ Thainville to Commissaire of External Relations, 25 August 1794, MAE, CP Turquie 188, fol. 495. Ellipses are in the original.

¹⁹ 'Analyse d'une note envoyée par Descorches', 13 August 1794, MAE, CP Turquie 188, fol. 435.

government, it seems, also became impatient with Descorches. The affair of the capture of the French frigate *Sybilie* by the British seems to have been the trigger for his recall. When the commissaire of external relations, Buchot, reported the event to the Committee of Public Safety, he commented that it was time to act more vigorously and with approved agents, according to a uniform plan, in order to bring about an alliance with the Ottomans.²⁰ As a result, the French government decided, by the beginning of October 1794, that the former envoy to Sweden, Raymond Verninac, should replace Descorches.²¹

PLAYING SAFE: AN OTTOMAN ATTEMPT TO END THE WAR OF THE FIRST COALITION

The French government's impatience with the Sublime Porte and the resulting recall of Descorches was yet another instance of bad timing in Franco-Ottoman diplomacy. It took the French revolutionary government an exceedingly long time to send its first envoy to Istanbul (see Chapter 2). Now, it recalled him too early—after less than two years. Although the Ottomans were trying to avoid any military confrontations with their neighbours, they did not reject the French as strategic allies. The Sublime Porte preferred a defensive alliance to an offensive one, since the Ottoman state needed to consolidate its own power base before engaging in any wars making up for the territorial losses of the previous decades. If the Ottoman government had declared itself in favour of France, this could have resulted in military confrontations with its northern neighbours, Austria and Russia, but also with Britain, a state with which the Sublime Porte had maintained friendly relations for centuries. So, from an Ottoman perspective, probably the most important strategic question regarding an alliance with France was how could they conclude such a pact without risking an immediate war with Austria and Russia, and without alienating Britain?

One possible option was to wait for the end of the ongoing European war before engaging in any serious negotiations over an alliance; but none could say how long this war would last and what would be its strategic results. Considering the Russian threat in particular, a powerful ally was needed as soon as possible, or the European provinces of the Ottoman Empire were likely to become the next Poland. This may have been the reasoning behind what became probably the very first Ottoman attempt to mediate a general peace in a major European war. Selim III had sent an ambassador to London in 1793 (see Chapter 2). The reform of diplomacy was part of Selim's *nizam-ı cedid* policies, and its purpose was to better integrate the Ottoman Empire into the European 'concert of powers'. Ambassadors to Berlin, Vienna, and Paris would follow later in the 1790s.²² If what the *reis ül-küttab*

²⁰ Commissaire of External Relations to Committee of Public Safety, 14 September 1794, MAE, CP Turquie 188, fol. 565.

²¹ Report to the Committee of Public Safety, 6 October 1794, MAE, CP Turquie 189, fol. 55.

²² Naff, 'Reform and the Conduct of Ottoman Diplomacy in the Reign of Selim III'; Ömer Kürkçüoğlu, 'The Adoption and Use of Permanent Diplomacy', in A. Nuri Yurdusev (ed.), *Ottoman Diplomacy: Conventional or Unconventional?* (New York, 2004), 131–50.

Mehmet Raşid Efendi told Descorches in January 1794 is true, the principal task of the new Ottoman ambassador to London was to negotiate a rapprochement between Britain and France, so that a Franco-Ottoman alliance could not be considered an act of hostility against Britain. If peace was restored between Paris and London, the Sublime Porte would have no qualms regarding an alliance with France.²³

During the year 1794, the Ottoman government made several attempts to start unofficial talks with different belligerent powers regarding peace or an armistice.²⁴ Then, at the end of the year, the Sublime Porte started an official initiative, contacting all great powers involved in the war and declaring that the Ottoman government was offering its good offices to the belligerent parties in order to start mediation talks for a general peace and to assist at a peace congress. The message to the French government emphasized that a general peace would facilitate a Franco-Ottoman alliance:

The main reason that prompted the Sublime Porte to employ the means necessary for an exhortation in favour of the precious object of peace and the extinction of the fire of war, burning for some time between the Republic of France and the Coalition powers, is solely based upon the hope of facilitating the affairs of the Republic of France, sincere friend of the Sublime Porte, and to pave the way for the preliminaries of the long-projected alliance between the Sublime Porte and the French Republic . . .²⁵

The reactions to the Ottoman initiatives were unanimously friendly, respectful, and reserved. The Austrian ambassador, for example, received one of the earlier Ottoman overtures, 'applauding the wise and humane views of the Porte', and expressing his appreciation of the Ottoman interest in the well-being of the Austrian monarchy.²⁶ However, when communicating the Ottoman overture to his superior, he noted his suspicion of a French intrigue behind the Ottoman mediation attempt, aimed at finally achieving Ottoman recognition of the French Republic.²⁷ The British ambassador had heard similar rumours, but he found other possible explanations for the Ottoman initiative:

An important consequence of the notion which the Grand Signior has imbibed respecting the superiority of the Christian powers, is a wish on his part to assimilate the Turkish Empire to the more polished kingdoms of Europe, particularly in regard to

²³ Descorches to Foreign Minister, 14 January 1794, MAE, CP Turquie 186, fol. 498.

²⁴ The Austrians, for example, were approached at the end of August. Raşid Efendi, who by then had been replaced as *reis ül-küttab*, privately contacted the Austrian dragoman. See Herbert to Thugut, 10 September 1794, HHStA, Türkei II, 107, July–September, fol. 354.

²⁵ Ottoman note to Descorches, translated by the French dragoman under the eyes of the *reis efendi* and the Ottoman dragoman, 12 December 1794, MAE, CP Turquie 189, fol. 353. The note to the British government, produced in a similar manner, on 5 December 1794, can be found in TNA, FO 78/15, fols. 31–2.

²⁶ The Austrian ambassador announced this to his superior after the initiative of Raşid Efendi, in late August. See Herbert to Thugut, 10 September 1794, HHStA, Türkei II, 107, July–September, fol. 354.

²⁷ Herbert to Thugut, 10 December 1794, HHStA, Diplomatisches Archiv, Türkei II, 108, fol. 313.

politics. He is desirous of obtaining information concerning their comparative strength and reciprocal interests, and to acquire some influence on their transactions. He is ambitious that the Sublime Porte should, during his reign, assume a rank amongst nations proportionate to the extent and resources of his dominions. It is perhaps this disposition that produced the [Ottoman peace initiative].²⁸

The British ambassador assumed, furthermore, that the sultan was trying to end the war in Europe to secure his domains from Russian aggression. As long as almost all other European powers were focusing on the war with France, they paid little attention to Russian southward expansionism, which Catherine II was likely to resume, now that the war in Poland was over.²⁹ France would be much better able to help the Ottoman Empire against this threat if it was at peace with its neighbours. Other European powers, for example Britain and Prussia, were also interested in Ottoman territorial integrity. Both states had already challenged Russian southward expansion in the early 1790s.³⁰ However, as long as the war was going on, France was not able to help either Poland or the Ottoman Empire against Russia; and the powers of the Coalition were unlikely to take a firm stance against Catherine II, who styled herself as nemesis to all republican revolutionaries. Finally, the military modernization process of the Ottoman Empire, intended to enable the Ottomans to defend themselves against outward aggression alone, was suffering from the war, because the severe crisis of Mediterranean commerce had diminished the revenues of the Ottoman state. These revenues were badly needed for the creation of a modern army and navy. It is probably for this reason that the Sublime Porte emphasized the commercial advantages of the re-establishment of peace in the note to the British government.³¹ London, however, was as little convinced by the Ottoman overture as Vienna. In its answer, the British government thanked the Sublime Porte, but declared that the French, who had started the war, would have to make the first move.³²

Yet the French, too, were not very appreciative of the Ottoman initiative. Descorches hoped, at the end of 1794, that he could use the mediation offer to further his own agenda: in his answer to the dragoman of the Sublime Porte, the French envoy remarked that the Ottoman government should probably recognize the Republic first and that a mediation at this point would only be helpful to the hard-pressed Coalition and not to the victorious French.³³ To his government, Descorches nevertheless presented the Ottoman initiative as an achievement that might lead to the swift conclusion of an alliance.³⁴ He substantiated his assumption a little later by reporting that the *reis efendi* had secretly asked him to submit a

²⁸ Liston to Grenville, 10 December 1794, TNA, FO 78/15, fol. 326.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, fol. 327.

³⁰ Firges, *Großbritannien und das Osmanische Reich Ende des 18. Jahrhunderts*, 97–8.

³¹ Liston to Grenville, 10 December 1794, TNA, FO 78/15, fol. 328.

³² Grenville to Liston, 3 February 1795, TNA, FO 78/16, fols. 33–6.

³³ Descorches to the Dragoman of the Porte [Callimachi], 13 December 1794, MAE, CP Turquie 189, fol. 354.

³⁴ Descorches to Commissaire of External Relations, 24 December 1794, MAE, CP Turquie 190, fol. 14.

draft treaty.³⁵ The French government thus considered the Ottoman overture as a token of 'good faith and goodwill'³⁶ and interpreted it, in line with Descorches's view, as an Ottoman attempt to approach the French without alienating their enemies:

It seems highly probable to us that the Ottoman ministry wanted to launch the mediation in order to reach the point [that would allow it] to solemnly recognize the Republic, to declare itself in her favour, and to tie itself to her interests, without offending the whole Coalition and without precipitating anything.³⁷

Nevertheless, the government in Paris also declined the Ottoman offer. The ruling Committee of Public Safety had no high opinion of mediations in general, which it considered below the dignity of the Republic. Also, the mediation of Sweden and Denmark at Basel, during the negotiations with Prussia, was tolerated rather than appreciated: '[A] mediation in the strict sense of the word could suit neither the dignity nor the interests of the Republic; however, we would not have refused to take both courts of the north... for witnesses or interpreters of our peaceful intentions.'³⁸ However, in order not to offend any Ottoman sensibilities, it was suggested that the French should assure the Sublime Porte that if ever there was a general peace congress, the French government would insist on Ottoman participation: 'One could add... that if ever the Republic negotiates for a general peace, she will explicitly demand that an Ottoman plenipotentiary participate. This idea of mediation, quite baroque in itself, seems to be regarded by the Ottoman ministers as a sublime expedient.'³⁹

REAPING WHAT WAS SOWN: THE MISSION OF RAYMOND VERNINAC (1795–6)

In late 1794 and early 1795, the prospects of a Franco-Ottoman alliance seemed to improve continuously. The destruction of the Polish state, on the one hand, and the success of the French armies, on the other, gave the negotiations a new drive. The territorial gains of Catherine II had alarmed not only the Ottomans, but also Sweden, and thus opened for the French the possibility of forming an anti-Russian triple alliance.⁴⁰ In reaction to the changing circumstances, the Ottoman government granted a special favour to the French envoy, allowing him, on 20 February 1795, to take up residence in the French embassy palace. The Ottomans knew that

³⁵ Descorches to Commissaire of External Relations, 31 December 1794, MAE, CP Turquie 190, fols. 42–3.

³⁶ Committee of Public Safety to Verninac, 21 February 1795, MAE, CP Turquie 190, fols. 246–7.

³⁷ Committee of Public Safety to Verninac, 28 March 1795, MAE, CP Turquie 190, fol. 375.

³⁸ Committee of Public Safety to Verninac, 21 February 1795, MAE, CP Turquie 190, fol. 242.

³⁹ Report, probably by Charles-Frédéric Reinhard, 11 March 1795, MAE, CP Turquie 190, fol. 319.

⁴⁰ The Swedish ambassador in France, Staël-Holstein to Verninac, 21 March 1795, MAE, CP Turquie 190, fol. 342.

this event would lead to frictions with the diplomats of the anti-French Coalition. They therefore claimed that it was mainly for health reasons that they allowed Descorches to reside in the French palace. Moreover, they even asked him to pretend that he was moving on his own initiative:

[As] our friend and guest... Descorches... had at one point adverted to... the extreme discomfort of his residence in Galata and to the bad air he breathed which had impaired his health, it was a question of finding him a house in Beşiktaş; but this arrangement did not come to pass, as it had been observed that hitherto no Frank had lived in this village, from which some inconveniences might result... [In] order to end the discomfort of his current lodging, as well as to enable him to closely watch over the good management of the chancellery [of the legation, we thought it appropriate] that our friend move to the [embassy] palace in Pera... From now on he is free to take up residence there; we are only asking him to do so modestly and without *éclat*;... [and] to announce this move as his own initiative.⁴¹

One day later Descorches moved to the former residence of the Most Christian King's ambassadors.⁴² The ambassadors of the anti-French Coalition regarded this event as a first step towards the recognition of the French Republic, the pretences of the Sublime Porte notwithstanding. At the end of February 1795, the Porte once more gave assurances that the Ottoman Empire would not recognize the French Republic unless another great power did so as well.⁴³ In the end, the Ottoman government kept this promise, as Prussia was already negotiating a separate peace with France at Basel.

Unfortunately for Descorches, the new prestige of residing in the French embassy, as well as the progress in his negotiations with the Ottoman government, came too late to save his post. At this time, just when the diplomatic breakthrough seemed to be at hand, the first rumours about his recall began to spread in Istanbul.⁴⁴ The Committee of Public Safety had already drafted a letter of recall in November 1794, giving only vague reasons.⁴⁵ It was, however, not until the arrival of his successor, in April 1795, that the letter of recall was handed to Descorches. The French government did not notify its envoy of his recall, even though the news of his replacement had spread in Istanbul already by the end of February.⁴⁶

The French government, it seems, was surprised to learn about Descorches's sudden diplomatic accomplishments. The new state of things raised some concerns about whether the recall of Descorches had not come at a bad time, especially since Descorches was considered to have a very good standing at the Sublime Porte. An

⁴¹ Descorches to Committee of Public Safety, 25 February 1795, MAE, CP Turquie 190, fols. 259–60.

⁴² Chalgrin to Flachslanden, 25 February 1795, Vienna, HHStA, Diplomatisches Archiv, Türkei II, 109, January–March, fol. 191.

⁴³ Herbert to Thugut, 25 February 1795, HHStA, Türkei II, 109, January–March, fols. 171–2.

⁴⁴ Chalgrin to Flachslanden, 25 February 1795, HHStA, Türkei II, 109, January–March, fol. 192.

⁴⁵ Committee of Public Safety to Descorches, 2 November 1794, MAE, CP Turquie 189, fol. 158.

⁴⁶ Chalgrin to Flachslanden, 10 March 1795, HHStA, Türkei II, 109, January–March, fol. 269.

internal analysis for the use of the Committee of Public Safety assessed his achievements positively and deplored his untimely recall:

There is no doubt that Descorches enjoyed the full confidence of the Porte. In this country, more than elsewhere, personal trust is everything. It would be very difficult to say that Descorches could have done better than he did, without instructions, without further assistance . . . It is unfortunate that he quits his post at the moment when the Porte seems to want to declare herself [in favour of France]. This disadvantage is without remedy . . .⁴⁷

The account, it seems, inspired the Committee of Public Safety to demand a further report concerning the circumstances of Descorches's replacement. This suggests that the committee members were not fully aware of the reasons that had prompted the same committee to recall its envoy to Istanbul, four months earlier:

At this moment it is quite difficult to say whether the inconveniences or the advantages of the recall of this envoy will be greater. He was recalled because in the old Committee of Public Safety [i.e. before 9 Thermidor] he was unanimously considered a traitor and this tradition had been passed on to the new [Committee of Public Safety]; his replacement was considered one of the most pressing diplomatic operations. Moreover he was noble; he had been absent from the home of the Revolution for two years; a very strong party had declared itself against him in Constantinople and in the *échelles*. Although unlikely, although unproven, the denunciations were extremely serious; his recall seemed a good politic move, even in the event that he was innocent. His conduct at the arrival of his successor will condemn or justify him altogether.⁴⁸

Descorches himself was extremely unhappy about being replaced, and he tried his utmost to avoid it, although it must have been clear to him that any protests came too late. The new envoy extraordinary, Verninac, arrived in Istanbul on 12 April 1795. Four days earlier, Descorches reported to the Committee of Public Safety that the Sublime Porte deplored his recall.⁴⁹ The day after his successor's arrival, Descorches raised severe concerns over his replacement and even suggested indirectly that the transition should be postponed until new orders from the French government had been received.⁵⁰ It is no wonder that Verninac did not comply with Descorches's wishes and insisted on taking over his new post immediately. The recalled envoy grudgingly accepted his fate and cooperated with his successor in a dutiful manner. Descorches could not, however, desist from complaining bitterly about his replacement to the Committee of Public Safety:

I would certainly not have acquitted myself adequately towards the Republic if I allowed myself to be deterred by whatever reason from devoting myself, up to the

⁴⁷ Report, probably by Charles-Frédéric Reinhard, 11 March 1795, MAE, CP Turquie 190, fol. 319.

⁴⁸ Report, probably by Reinhard to the Committee of Public Safety, 29 March 1795, MAE, CP Turquie 190, fol. 392.

⁴⁹ Descorches to Committee of Public Safety, 8 April 1795, MAE, CP Turquie 190, fol. 406.

⁵⁰ Descorches to Verninac, 13 April 1795, MAE, CP Turquie 190, fol. 411.

last moment of my official relations with you, citizens, to submitting to you everything that appears to me true and useful for you to know. Nothing can therefore impair my conviction, which still grows stronger, that you must have been singularly misled over the political, moral, and administrative state of the Levant, to have taken a measure which shocks, I dare to say, all matters that are related to our interests in this country. Our enemies rejoice about [this decision] as a victory; the Turks are appalled, and the true republicans in mourning. How many tears I saw flowing these last days! Such is the current effect . . . I very much desire to be mistaken; I assure you, my wishes for the success of Verninac are more ardent than anybody else's, [and] I serve him with all that I know [and] all that I can [do]; I could serve him even better if he was less reserved towards me.⁵¹

The Committee of Public Safety reacted with surprise and displeasure to Descorches's protest,⁵² and the new envoy to Istanbul, Verninac, met his predecessor's behaviour with resentment. He supposed that Descorches and his wife had tried to engineer an intrigue in Paris to have Descorches's recall countermanded.⁵³ Furthermore, he denounced his predecessor's diplomatic conduct as highly unprofessional.⁵⁴ Verninac may have wronged his predecessor. After all, Descorches had left him a well-prepared field. The Sublime Porte was about to recognize the French Republic and was ready to negotiate an alliance.

The conditions for Verninac's mission were decidedly better than for his predecessor. The Committee of Public Safety corresponded with the new envoy on a regular basis. The number of signatures on the letters sent to Istanbul indicate that the committee's members now paid more attention to Franco-Ottoman diplomacy. The French government's management of foreign affairs had definitely improved; the administrative chaos gave way to a new bureaucratic routine. Moreover, Verninac's mission benefitted greatly from improved funding and staffing. The French government even sent him two new printing presses, as well as several professional printers.⁵⁵

In addition to the enhancement of the internal working conditions of the French legation in Istanbul, the external circumstances also improved rapidly. The Peace of Basel, which implied the official acknowledgement of the French Republic by Prussia, finally fulfilled the Ottoman prerequisite of a precedent, set by a great power, for recognizing the new French government. On 5 April 1795, the negotiating parties in the Swiss city reached an agreement. About one month later, on 4 May, the news of the settlement reached the Ottoman capital.⁵⁶ The Sublime Porte reacted quickly, and by 21 May 1795, the Ottoman government had officially

⁵¹ Descorches to Committee of Public Safety, 24 April 1795, MAE, CP Turquie 191, fol. 11.

⁵² Committee of Public Safety to Verninac, 21 June 1795, MAE, CP Turquie 191, fol. 165.

⁵³ Verninac, 'Rapport sur les intrigues pratiquées à Paris à l'occasion du rappel du citoyen Descorches, tendantes à discréditer à Constantinople le nouvel envoyé du gouvernement et à produire une commotion', 3 September 1795, MAE, CP Turquie 191, fols. 375–8.

⁵⁴ Verninac to Committee of Public Safety, 31 August 1795, MAE, CP Turquie 191, fol. 352.

⁵⁵ The Commission of External Relations to the Commission of Transportation, Post, and Couriers, 22 March 1795, MAE, CP Turquie 190, fol. 343; Extract from the registers of the Committee of Public Safety, 3 February 1795, MAE, CP Turquie 190, fol. 156.

⁵⁶ 'Politique, Turquie. Constantinople, le 10 mai', *Moniteur universel*, No. 283, 1 July 1795.

recognized Verninac and hence the French Republic, which, according to the Austrian ambassador, was 'an event that surprised everybody'.⁵⁷ Shortly afterwards, Verninac went with a large entourage in a procession through Istanbul to the Sublime Porte, where he had his inaugural audience with the grand vizier.⁵⁸ The Ottoman government treated Verninac with 'all the usual formalities' accorded to earlier French envoys, including the distribution of valuable caftans (Ottoman court robes) to his retinue.⁵⁹ The goals of Verninac's mission were not very different from those of his predecessor. The French government instructed him to form an offensive alliance with the Ottoman Empire. The Thermidorian Committee of Public Safety had realized that it was extremely difficult to persuade the Sublime Porte to launch an attack against Austria. Verninac was, therefore, ordered to incite the Ottomans into a war against Russia, 'which the Muslim nation⁶⁰ regards as their principal enemy'. Such a war would also help Poland to regain its independence. Once the Ottomans had attacked Russia, according to the reckoning of the French government, the Austrians would have no option but to get involved as well. Even if Austria stayed out of the war, it would at least be obliged to dispatch a considerable force to secure the Habsburg Empire's eastern and southern frontiers—troops that could not then be employed against France.⁶¹

After about one year, the new French envoy reached a deal over an alliance treaty with the Sublime Porte. Alas, he did not negotiate the kind of alliance the French government had asked him to discuss with the Ottomans. Paris had become less enthusiastic about an Ottoman alliance after major enemies of the Republic had dropped out of the First Coalition during 1795 (Prussia, Spain, and the Netherlands).⁶² Verninac nevertheless continued negotiating with the Ottoman government. In the end, on 23 May 1796, he reached an agreement over a defensive and not an offensive Franco-Ottoman alliance—a treaty that may have suited Ottoman interests, by providing an ally against possible Russian aggression, but which had little strategic value for France. Verninac, nevertheless, presented the draft as the best result that could be expected under the circumstances, considering that such a treaty, in order to last, had to be 'equally beneficial to both contracting parties'.⁶³

According to Verninac, the main justification for the conclusion of a defensive alliance was the need 'to prevent the ruin of the Turks and to revive their power'.⁶⁴ This was desirable for three reasons:

1. Because the increase of power and influence in favour of Russia, resulting from their ruin, would completely destroy the balance of Europe and undermine the preponderance

⁵⁷ Herbert to Thugut, 26 May 1795, HHStA, Türkei II, 109, April–June, fol. 184.

⁵⁸ Feuillatré, 'Un cortège républicain à Constantinople le 20 Prairial an III (8 juin 1795)', 511.

⁵⁹ 'Politique, Turquie. Constantinople, le 28 mai [sic]', *Moniteur universel*, No. 329, 18 August 1795.

⁶⁰ In the French original, it is 'nation musulmane'. Contemporary Europeans often used 'Muslim' and 'Turk' synonymously.

⁶¹ Instructions to Verninac, MAE, CP Turquie 189, fol. 182.

⁶² Soysal, *Fransız ihtilâli ve Türk-Fransız Diplomasi Münasebetleri*, 138.

⁶³ Verninac to Foreign Minister, 26 May 1796, MAE, CP Turquie 193, fol. 456.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, fol. 455.

and perhaps also the independence of the Republic. 2. Because the navigation and trade of the Republic would receive a fatal blow. 3. Because the Turks can be very useful to France when she is at war with Austria . . . It follows that an alliance between France and the Porte is in the nature of things.⁶⁵

It is worth examining some of the stipulations of Verninac's treaty draft. Given that the treaty was to be concluded between a revolutionary republic and a monarchy, it became a question of how the contracting partners should be defined. Article 1 states that the treaty was contracted between the French Republic and the sultan, as well as the French and Ottoman peoples.⁶⁶ This formulation is unusual. The Prussian Peace of Basel, for example, was concluded exclusively between the French Republic and the King of Prussia. Furthermore, the treaty of peace and alliance between France and the Batavian Republic and the peace with Spain, as well as the Franco-Spanish alliance of August 1796, did not use such formulations.⁶⁷ From a French perspective, this expression was probably preferred, as it could be interpreted as implying a claim to sovereignty of the people.⁶⁸ From an Ottoman point of view, on the other hand, the phrase could have been a response to the political instability of France. The Ottoman government had confirmed the validity of all treaties between the king and the sultan after the fall of the monarchy (see Chapter 1). The formula could thus also imply a claim to validity, even if the government of France were to change again.

In Article 3, the contracting parties guaranteed each other their territorial possessions. For the Sublime Porte this meant all the lands within the existing borders of the Ottoman Empire, while the possessions of the French Republic included all the territories which would be ceded to France after a general pacification. Thus, the treaty could only come into effect after the end of the present war—a condition that was necessary for maintaining the Ottoman neutrality policy.⁶⁹ The following articles fixed what kind of assistance the contracting partners had to give to each other if one of them were to be attacked, and also specified that this assistance was to be given only for conflicts on the European continent.⁷⁰ Interestingly, Verninac considered the main advantages gained by the French through this treaty to be not so much strategic as commercial: the treaty would open up the trade in the Black Sea for the French (Article 14) and it would protect French merchants from unjust persecution.⁷¹ Politically, however, the

⁶⁵ Ibid., fol. 455.

⁶⁶ Draft treaty of a defensive alliance between the French Republic and Sultan Selim III, 23 May 1796, MAE, CP Turquie 193, fol. 444: 'entre la République française et le sultan heureusement régnant, ainsi que ses glorieux successeurs; de même qu'entre le peuple français et le peuple ottoman'.

⁶⁷ *Recueil général des traités de paix. D'alliance et de commerce de neutralité et suspensions d'armes conclus par la République française avec les différentes puissances continentales pendant la guerre de la Révolution* (Paris, 1802), 10, 35, 53, 201.

⁶⁸ The recognition of the principle that sovereignty was vested in the nation was an important goal of French republican diplomacy. See Belissa, 'War and Diplomacy (1792–1795)', 431.

⁶⁹ Draft treaty of a defensive alliance between the French Republic and Sultan Selim III, 23 May 1796, MAE, CP Turquie 193, fol. 445.

⁷⁰ Ibid., fol. 446.

⁷¹ Verninac to Foreign Minister, 26 May 1796, MAE, CP Turquie 193, fol. 458.

treaty would provide only very limited concrete benefits to the French. A secret convention even discharged the Sublime Porte from the obligation to assist France in conflicts with Britain.⁷² This convention, it seems, was a *sine qua non* for the Ottoman government, as the Sublime Porte had always seen its friendly relations with Britain as a major obstacle to an alliance with France. An alliance was only feasible for the Ottoman government, therefore, after France had made peace with Britain; and even then, the possibility of a military confrontation between Istanbul and London had to be ruled out. Verninac justified the secret convention by arguing that in a war with Britain, the Ottomans would be of marginal help anyway.⁷³

The French government may have accepted the purely defensive character of the alliance, even though Verninac had orders to negotiate an alliance that was both defensive and offensive in character. The secret convention, however, was unacceptable for the French Directory. The French government considered the treaty unbalanced, because it would oblige France to get involved in costly wars against Russia while the Ottomans were exempted from supporting France against Britain: 'There exists thus in this treaty neither equality nor reciprocity.'⁷⁴ Therefore, the Directory decided not to ratify Verninac's treaty:

[The Directory is] entirely convinced that it is in the interest of the Republic to prevent the ruin of the Turks, which would entail the ruin of a major part of our trade and undermine the independence of Europe through the enormous growth of Russian power. However, as you have [rightly] observed, an alliance is but illusory if its conditions are not mutually advantageous for both parties. It is according to this principle, which you are rightly referring to, that the Directory has assessed and rejected the treaty which you had signed.⁷⁵

The French rejection of Verninac's treaty came as a surprise to the Sublime Porte. The Ottomans apparently considered the ratification a mere formality and were therefore very disappointed by the French government's decision. The *reis efendi*, in particular, reacted with stupefaction when he heard about the Directory's intention to reject the treaty.⁷⁶ Meanwhile, Verninac had requested leave for private reasons and the French government nominated a new representative for Istanbul (on 14 February 1796).⁷⁷ Verninac's successor, General Aubert-Dubayet, was given a more high-ranking title of ambassador to facilitate his negotiations. He was, however, to be no more successful than his predecessors.

⁷² Secret convention of the alliance treaty, 23 May 1796, MAE, CP Turquie 193, fol. 448.

⁷³ Verninac to Foreign Minister, 26 May 1796, MAE, CP Turquie 193, fol. 456.

⁷⁴ Foreign Minister to Verninac, 30 June 1796, CADN, Constantinople, Ambassade, Série B5, unfoliated.

⁷⁵ Ibid.

⁷⁶ Verninac to Foreign Minister, 2 August 1796, MAE, CP Turquie 194, fol. 189.

⁷⁷ Jean-Louis Bacqué-Grammont, Sinan Kunalalp, and Frédéric Hitzel, *Représentants permanents de la France en Turquie (1536–1991) et de la Turquie en France (1797–1991)* (Istanbul, 1991), 42–3.

FROM ALLIANCE TO IMPERIALIST AGGRESSION: THE MISSION OF GENERAL AUBERT-DUBAYET (1796–7)

Jean-Annibal-Baptiste Aubert-Dubayet had, unlike his precursors, no professional diplomatic experience when he became the French Republic's representative to the Sublime Porte. When Descorches was sent to Istanbul, he had already been serving on diplomatic missions for over ten years.⁷⁸ Verninac had received a solid training in public law and had had four years of diplomatic practice before he assumed his post in the Ottoman capital.⁷⁹ Aubert-Dubayet, however, was a man of the army. Born in New Orleans, he had entered the ranks at the age of 17 and had fought under La Fayette in the American War of Independence; he became a general at the beginning of the War of the First Coalition. Before he was appointed ambassador to Istanbul, he had held the post of minister of war for three months.⁸⁰ Sending a diplomatically inexperienced army officer on a diplomatic mission was not unusual under the Directory. In fact, generals were sent out to represent the Republic in many capitals, such as Madrid, Naples, and Vienna.⁸¹ In the case of Istanbul, such a selection made a certain degree of sense, as Aubert-Dubayet also supervised a great number of military advisors who were sent along with him in order to assist with the modernizing process of the Ottoman military. Nevertheless, diplomatically, the British chargé d'affaires judged him to be 'certainly the least dangerous official opponent of all I have seen in this residence'.⁸²

The new ambassador's instructions differed considerably from those of his predecessors. The strategic position of France had changed dramatically. The Republic had become an expansionist state, relying on conquest to be able to finance its vast armies, which by now had a decided superiority on the European battlefields.⁸³ It was only a question of time until peace with Austria would be restored. Therefore, an Ottoman rupture with Austria—one of the principal goals of Descorches and Verninac—became less desirable, because it would complicate the peace negotiations. The French Directory suggested instead that the Ottoman government should rather become more active in areas where the Republic was geographically not able to intervene. One of the great objectives of French foreign policy in Eastern Europe, apart from the stability of the Ottoman Empire, was the re-establishment of an independent Poland. Thus, the Sublime Porte, possibly in concert with Sweden, Denmark, and Prussia, should be engaged against Russia rather than against Austria.⁸⁴ Aubert-Dubayet's instructions were drawn up only two years before the French government decided to attack Ottoman Egypt.

⁷⁸ Ibid., 40.

⁷⁹ Feuillatré, 'Un projet d'alliance monarchique sous la Terreur', 211.

⁸⁰ Bacqué-Grammont, Kuneralp and Hitzel, *Représentants permanents de la France en Turquie (1536–1991) et de la Turquie en France (1797–1991)*, 42.

⁸¹ Auguste Dry, *Soldats ambassadeurs sous le Directoire. An IV–an VIII*, 2 vols. (Paris, 1906), vol. 1, ii.

⁸² Smith to Grenville, 25 December 1797, TNA, FO 78/18, fol. 432.

⁸³ Stone, *Reinterpreting the French Revolution*, 219–20, 232.

⁸⁴ Instructions for Aubert-Dubayet, February/March 1796, MAE, CP Turquie 193, fol. 263.

Nevertheless, they convey the impression that the French were not less, but even more interested than ever in the territorial integrity of the Ottoman Empire:

The Turks are our most natural, our oldest, our most faithful, and our most necessary allies. We have experienced from their side only loyalty and kind attention. The former government [before the Revolution] responded to them only with indifference or ingratitude . . . They had made all the advances, but at the time they were greeted coldly.⁸⁵

The French government now intended not only to declare its amity to the Ottomans, but also to suit the action to the word by sending military assistance on an unprecedented scale to the Ottoman Empire.⁸⁶

These decisions, however, were taken before Verninac had communicated his alliance treaty to the French government. In the course of 1796, probably somewhat disillusioned by Verninac's treaty draft, which proved that the Ottomans were not willing to join any military adventures against their neighbours, Paris realized that a defensive alliance was a burden rather than an asset. The French Directory changed its stance towards the alliance negotiations accordingly, and demanded in December 1796 that the Ottoman government should fulfil certain preconditions, before negotiations could continue. Interestingly, the idea of a more active diplomatic involvement of the Ottomans, which all European powers had dismissed two years before, now came into play again. Paris now judged it expedient for an acceleration of the negotiations with Austria that the Sublime Porte should offer mediation, and simultaneously send troops to the Danube in order to put pressure on the Austrians. 'This is perhaps the only occasion the Sublime Ottoman Porte will find in a long time to pay us the price for an alliance necessary for their preservation.'⁸⁷ Quite obviously, the French tone towards the Ottomans had changed and become much more demanding. As further preconditions for an alliance, the French government expected the Sublime Porte to open the Black Sea for French shipping and to accord commercial advantages to the French that had already been granted to the Austrians and Russians.⁸⁸

Three weeks later, the French Directory ordered the complete interruption of alliance negotiations. This step was justified by both the peace talks with Austria and the death of Catherine II (on 17 November 1796), which gave rise to the hope that both Austria and Russia would end their enmity towards France: 'At this moment, . . . such a treaty would sound like a battle cry which could lead to new troubles and calamities.'⁸⁹ Foreign Minister Delacroix suggested that instead of an alliance treaty, Aubert-Dubayet should now negotiate an improvement of the conditions for French commerce in the Ottoman Empire. Moreover, the foreign minister instructed his ambassador to assure the Sublime Porte that France nevertheless intended to continue its engagement in the Ottoman military modernization

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, fol. 249.

⁸⁶ Firges, 'Gunnery for the Sultan', 176–8.

⁸⁷ Delacroix to Aubert-Dubayet, 15 December 1796, CADN, Constantinople, Ambassade, Série B10, unfoliated.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*

⁸⁹ Delacroix to Aubert-Dubayet, 8 January 1797, CADN, Constantinople, Ambassade, Série B10, unfoliated.

process, and that, in case of war, the Republic would assist the Ottoman state indirectly and maybe even more effectively than within the framework of a formal alliance. After all, 'the Porte had always been the natural ally of France'.⁹⁰

Later, in September 1797, Ambassador Aubert-Dubayet proposed a joint Franco-Ottoman attack on Austria, if the peace negotiations should fail.⁹¹ This was less than half a year before the French government decided to invade Egypt. Revolutionary France had attempted for roughly five years to win the Ottoman Empire as a prime ally. For different reasons, neither the besieged nor the victorious French Republic achieved this diplomatic goal. The present analysis of Franco-Ottoman negotiations can, therefore, end here. In the summer of 1798 France invaded Egypt and it was not until 1802 that peace was re-established between Istanbul and Paris. By then, Napoleon had become the undisputed ruler of France.

However, one question still needs to be addressed: why did France, at the end of 1796, try to implement an ambitious scheme of military assistance, including great numbers of military instructors and the nucleus of a modernized armaments industry—all envisaged for years, in order to strengthen Ottoman territorial integrity—and then, at the beginning of 1798, decide to conquer Ottoman Egypt? The end of the negotiations for a formal alliance was surely not the beginning of French enmity towards the Ottomans, as we have seen. France and the Ottoman Empire had been strategic allies for centuries without a formal treaty.

So, how could French governments all through the Revolution declare their most sincere friendship and strategic interest in an alliance with the Ottoman Empire and then, suddenly, attack an Ottoman province? To gain a better understanding of this apparent contradiction, it is necessary to look at the geostrategic reasoning behind the cooperation with the Sublime Porte and the invasion of Egypt. A letter from Descorches, written in September 1793, sets out an exemplary version of the original rationale behind the French policies of cooperation. Similar reasoning can be found in a great number of strategy reports and policy papers, written for or emanating from various French government institutions that were concerned with the conduct of foreign relations. For the French envoy, there were two main reasons why the Republic should not give up trying to bring about an alliance with the Sublime Porte.

First, he considered the Ottomans as the key to the destruction of the 'Colossus of the North'—Russia, 'whose presence in Europe will never allow liberty to calmly exercise its benefits; and under whose protection despotism, aristocracy, and the anti-liberals of every kind continue their depredations'.⁹² A favourite strategy for French policymakers was the creation of a coalition of buffer states, including Sweden, Poland, and the Ottoman Empire, to balance the pre-eminence of Russia in Eastern Europe. The second reason for French interest in the stability of the

⁹⁰ Ibid.

⁹¹ Aubert-Dubayet to Talleyrand, 9 October 1797, CADN, Constantinople, Ambassade, Série B9, unfoliated. It was Aubert-Dubayet's last treaty proposal, since he died on 17 December 1797. See Dry, *Soldats ambassadeurs sous le Directoire*, vol. 1, 488.

⁹² MAE, CP Turquie 185, fol. 281.

Ottoman Empire was an economic one. France had large stakes in Levantine commerce and some areas in the south of France were considered virtually to live off the Levant trade.⁹³ The Ottoman Empire was a giant market and, thanks to the capitulations, French merchants had very good access to it.

[Despite] their slowness and hesitations, . . . I think we will in the end agree that the moroseness and awkwardness of these people are for us still preferable to their dismemberment, at least for the moment; for even if we obtained a good share in such a partition, our enemies would also get theirs, whereas we should fully focus on their destruction; in a word, our present and future commercial benefits, as we have them now, . . . could not be replaced by anything and they are well worth a few indulgences, [and] even many sacrifices . . .⁹⁴

Had the Ottoman state been dismembered, French commerce would have probably lost access to all the provinces that fell prey to other nations, for it was likely that states such as Russia would prefer a mercantilist economic policy and thus close newly acquired territories to foreign products. The Ottoman capitulations, with their guarantees for French trade, thus became an argument for the territorial integrity of the Ottoman Empire. Due to the relative weakness of the Ottoman state, however, the capitulations subsequently were also a gateway through which the European powers exercised their indirect political and economic domination over the Ottoman Empire.⁹⁵

The suggestion to conquer Egypt, or indeed another province of the Ottoman Empire, was not a new element in French geostrategic discourse.⁹⁶ Especially in the aftermath of the disastrous war of 1768–74, which ended in the Peace of Küçük Kaynarca, propositions for a French intervention at the expense of the Sublime Porte became more virulent.⁹⁷ Historians studying the French discourse on foreign policy in public and ministerial opinion during the last decades of the eighteenth century have identified ‘two opposing schools of thought’ regarding this issue.⁹⁸ One group, the so-called ‘*clan interventionniste*’⁹⁹ advocated the seizure of Ottoman

⁹³ Descorches to Foreign Minister, 1 September 1793, MAE, CP Turquie 185, fol. 282.

⁹⁴ Ibid., fol. 283.

⁹⁵ Only at the beginning of World War I was the Ottoman government finally in a position to abolish these privileges, which, at the time when they were introduced were meant to increase the customs revenues of the sultan, but which had become a huge economic burden by the time of their suppression. See Edhem Eldem, ‘Capitulations and Western Trade’, in Suraiya N. Faruqi (ed.), *The Cambridge History of Turkey: The Later Ottoman Empire, 1603–1839*, 4 vols. (Cambridge, 2006), vol. 3, 283–335, 320.

⁹⁶ The German philosopher Leibniz, who tried to divert the Sun King’s expansionism away from his eastern neighbours, had already suggested a French invasion of Egypt to Louis XIV. This episode, however, had most probably already been largely forgotten by the time of the actual invasion. See François Charles-Roux, *Les Origines de l’expédition d’Égypte* (Paris, 1910), 22.

⁹⁷ The teleological argumentation of the author notwithstanding, a good overview of many of the different proposals for intervention, made to the French government during the second half of the eighteenth century, can be found Ibid.

⁹⁸ Kaiser, ‘The Evil Empire?’, 26.

⁹⁹ Chatherine Boppe-Vigne, ‘Émigrés français de Constantinople en Russie pendant la Révolution’, in Jean-Pierre Poussou, Anne Mézin, and Yves Perret-Gentil (eds.), *L’Influence française en Russie au XVIIIe siècle* (Paris, 2004), 411–27, 273; Aksan, ‘Breaking the Spell of the Baron de Tott’, 258.

territories for France. The other group, often associated with Louis XVI's foreign minister, Vergennes (1774–87), supported the consolidation of Ottoman power, in order to restrain British and Russian expansionism in the Eastern Mediterranean.¹⁰⁰ However, I would argue that the sharp distinction between an expansionist and a pro-Ottoman group should be set aside in favour of a more faceted model. In fact, in the conceptions of some French strategists, assistance for the Ottoman state and French imperial ambitions in the Eastern Mediterranean were not necessarily in contradiction with each other. A strategy report, written for the French government in 1795, exemplifies this. Composed by an unknown author, it is possibly the work of a (former) member of the French consular administration in the Levant. The report stated that during the first years of the Revolution, France had lost its economic predominance in the Eastern Mediterranean. Moreover, Russia came to menace the very existence of the Ottoman Empire and thus the French prospect of regaining its old position in Levantine commerce.¹⁰¹ In order to protect the Ottoman Empire and thus French trade, France should conclude an offensive and defensive alliance with the Sublime Porte. In case of an attack on Ottoman territory, the Sublime Porte should assign a port on the island of Crete (Candia) as an assembly point for French troops:¹⁰²

We would take care of the defence of the island, only to return it after the war, or when the Porte had fulfilled the conditions of the treaty. Once the masters [of the island], we would see that we find a way to keep it . . . One means which seems suitable, would be to insert a stipulation into the treaty that the Porte has to indemnify us for the costs of war and that as long as the payments of compensation are pending, we would retain control over the island of Candia. After this we would make them understand the necessity that we keep it for longer.¹⁰³

The author thus combined a colonial project in the Eastern Mediterranean with the French policy of assisting the Ottoman Empire against its enemies. He furthermore pointed out how this island, rich in natural resources, would prosper under a rational government. Almost all imperialist conquests of the time were justified in a similar manner. Finally, he argued that Crete could be considered a compensation for the loss of French colonies in the Caribbean.¹⁰⁴ This was one way to

¹⁰⁰ Frédéric Hitzel, 'La France et la modernisation de l'Empire ottoman à la fin du XVIIIe siècle', in Patrice Bret (ed.), *L'Expédition d'Égypte. Une entreprise des lumières 1798–1801* (Paris, 1999), 9–19, 10; cf. Marcel Ahano, 'L'Image de la Révolution française lors de la modernisation de l'Iran et de la Turquie contemporains', *Cahiers d'études sur la Méditerranée orientale et le monde turco-iranien* (CEMOTI), 12 (1991), 5–20, 9.

¹⁰¹ 'Observations sur notre position en Levant et moyens d'y rétablir notre prépondérance', 26 May 1795, MAE, CP Turquie 191, fols. 127–9.

¹⁰² Crete had been a popular object of French imperialist ambitions during the old regime. See Hitzel, 'La France et la modernisation de l'Empire ottoman à la fin du XVIIIe siècle', 17; Avigdor Levy, 'Military Reform and the Problem of Centralization in the Ottoman Empire in the Eighteenth Century', *Middle Eastern Studies*, 18(3) (1982), 227–49, 236.

¹⁰³ 'Observations sur notre position en Levant et moyens d'y rétablir notre prépondérance', 26 May 1795, MAE, CP Turquie 191, fols. 129–30.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, fol. 130.

reconcile imperial expansion with a commitment to a Franco-Ottoman alliance. A similar reasoning was employed to justify the invasion of Egypt.

The Franco-Austrian rapprochement, which led to the Peace of Campo Formio (concluded 17 October 1797), was an important step towards the attack on Ottoman Egypt, since it changed the French position in the Eastern Mediterranean significantly. France and Austria had partitioned the Republic of Venice and France had acquired the Ionian Islands, off the coast of Ottoman Greece. Before the Peace of Campo Formio, Eastern Europe was the focus of French Ottoman policies, with the consequence that Paris focused on the need to strengthen the Ottoman Empire, in order to menace Russia and Austria. After Campo Formio, Austria dropped out of the war.¹⁰⁵ The First Coalition against revolutionary France was thus dissolved and only one state continued the war against the French Republic: Britain. Geopolitical strategies of the French were now bound to focus on this last remaining enemy, and since a direct invasion of the British Isles was deemed extremely risky, the French government searched for a weak spot in British imperial power. This spot was actually a whole subcontinent, namely India. This was London's single most important colonial possession, the origin of much of Britain's wealth, and the reason for its geopolitical predominance. A daring plan, advocated most prominently by General Napoleon Bonaparte and Foreign Minister Talleyrand, envisaged the conquest of India, first by capturing a suitable Eastern Mediterranean naval base (Malta), and then by establishing a French protectorate in Egypt. From there, a French army could either sail to India or march overland, via Mesopotamia and Persia.¹⁰⁶

In this plan, it seems, the aggression against the old Ottoman ally was accepted as a kind of collateral damage. This fits well into Malcolm Yapp's analysis that for all European powers 'their interests in the East were subsidiary to their interests in Europe'.¹⁰⁷ As early as August 1797, when the French occupied the Ionian islands, Bonaparte suggested that France should take possession of Egypt, since he believed that the Ottoman Empire was bound to perish.¹⁰⁸ Albert Sorel credited Talleyrand with the dubious honour of having solved the problem of how to justify an attack on an ancient and faithful ally. The French foreign minister proposed to intervene in Egypt 'in the name of the Porte, and as an ally or at least a friend, to become established as a protector and to stay there as dominator'.¹⁰⁹ Only if the Ottomans offered resistance to this way of 'protecting' them would the French turn against their allies, or, as Talleyrand formulated it in a letter to Bonaparte: 'As for Egypt, . . . if we conquer it, then it has to be for the Porte'.¹¹⁰ As in the project for the conquest of Crete, this rationale, combining aggression and assistance, was not the unique

¹⁰⁵ Russia had never officially entered the war.

¹⁰⁶ Anderson, *The Eastern Question*, 24–6.

¹⁰⁷ Yapp, *The Making of the Modern Near East*, 58.

¹⁰⁸ Charles-Roux, *Les Origines de l'expédition d'Égypte*, 299–300.

¹⁰⁹ Sorel, *L'Europe et la Révolution française*, vol. 5, 299. The quotation is my translation of Sorel's words.

¹¹⁰ Talleyrand to Bonaparte, 23 September 1797, quoted in Charles-Roux, *Les Origines de l'expédition d'Égypte*, 303.

invention of Talleyrand. He was, however, a member of the government that put this justification of aggression into practice by deciding on the invasion, on 5 March 1798.¹¹¹ Bonaparte was instructed for his mission to 'maintain, as much as it is in his powers, a good understanding with the Grand Seigneur'.¹¹² The ruling French Directory, in principle pro-Ottoman, was seemingly appeased by the prospect of striking the British a deadly blow and by Talleyrand's offer to go to Istanbul himself to prevent a rupture with the Sublime Porte. The directors were also not unhappy to see the all-too-powerful Bonaparte far removed from Paris.¹¹³ The French government cherished hopes that it could convince the Ottoman government that the invasion in Egypt was not an inimical act, but in fact a friendly turn, relieving the Sublime Porte from unruly Mamluk warlords and establishing a French administration under Ottoman suzerainty that would punctually pay the ordinary tribute of this province to the government in Istanbul.¹¹⁴

The Ottomans, however, saw what kind of game the French government was playing. In fact, as Kahraman Şakul has shown, 'the Sublime Porte [had] never fully trusted France'. The French occupation of the Ionian Islands in particular was highly alarming to the Ottoman government, and led to a rapprochement with Russia.¹¹⁵ The French attack on Egypt did not come as a surprise to the Sublime Porte.¹¹⁶ The Ottoman government denounced this attack as an 'unprecedented act of crime',¹¹⁷ declared war on France (2 September 1798) and concluded a triple alliance with Russia (3 January 1799) and Britain (5 January 1799).¹¹⁸

CONCLUSION

Thus ended, in 1798, over 250 years of peaceful Franco-Ottoman relations. In many ways the invasion in Egypt opened a new chapter of global history. So-called 'natural allies' (the Ottoman Empire and France) became enemies and 'natural enemies' (the Ottoman Empire and Russia) became allies. This diplomatic revolution in the Eastern Mediterranean, which the great Ottoman historian Ahmed Cevdet described as 'one of the oddities of diplomacy of the age',¹¹⁹ led to an unprecedented degree of cooperation of Ottoman and non-Ottoman (mostly Russian and British) forces. The Ottoman state became a key member of the Second Coalition against France. From 1798 onwards, power politics in the Eastern Mediterranean changed thoroughly, as British policymakers fully realized the strategic importance of this region for the

¹¹¹ Sorel, *L'Europe et la Révolution française*, vol. 5, 300.

¹¹² Instructions for Bonaparte, 12 April 1798, quoted Ibid., 301.

¹¹³ Ibid., 300. ¹¹⁴ Anderson, *The Eastern Question*, 26.

¹¹⁵ Şakul, 'An Ottoman Global Moment', 51.

¹¹⁶ Ibid., 76–7. A sultanic decree (*hatt-ı şerif*) of 1779 shows that, by this time, the Sublime Porte had realized that the Red Sea region was a possible target of European imperialist endeavours. See Firges, *Großbritannien und das Osmanische Reich Ende des 18. Jahrhunderts*, 35–8.

¹¹⁷ Şakul, 'An Ottoman Global Moment', 79.

¹¹⁸ Thomas Naff, 'Ottoman Diplomacy and the Great European Powers: 1789–1802', doctoral thesis (University of California, 1961), 242, 268.

¹¹⁹ Quoted in Şakul, 'An Ottoman Global Moment', 49.

defence of their imperial possessions in India.¹²⁰ Thus, in the following century, the great European powers began to see the Ottoman Empire as a less important actor in European power politics, but as a crucial (if rather passive) factor from a global geopolitical perspective.

Ambassador Aubert-Dubayet did not live to see these developments. He had died in late 1797, half a year before the invasion of Egypt began. He was succeeded for three months by his adjutant, Jean-François Carra Saint-Cyr, and then by the first dragoman Pierre-Jean Ruffin as chargé d'affaires. Ruffin did not enjoy his new post for long, for after the French invasion the Ottoman government sent him to the Seven Towers fortress, where he was detained from September 1798 to August 1801.¹²¹ Descorches, on the other hand, was still a defender of the territorial integrity of the Ottoman Empire in 1799.¹²² However, his diplomatic career had ended in Istanbul. The French government had entertained plans to send him back to the Ottoman Empire in 1798, but the rupture with the Sublime Porte rendered this scheme superfluous. In 1800, he became prefect of the *département* of Drôme in south-east France.¹²³

Four years of Franco-Ottoman negotiations, from 1793 to 1797, did not lead to an alliance treaty that was deemed acceptable to both sides, although France and the Ottoman state had been strategic partners for centuries. The failure had many causes, political as well as organizational. Nevertheless, Franco-Ottoman relations before the attack on Egypt were marked by mutual cooperation in many fields: Ottoman loans for the French administration in the Levant, and French military instructors for the Ottoman army and navy, to name but two. The Ottoman government's reaction to the French Revolution is comparable to that of other 'benevolent' neutral states, such as the United States, Denmark, and Sweden. Conducting negotiations while not officially recognizing the French Republic until 1795 was also the favoured policy of the Scandinavian monarchies; and both the United States and the Ottoman Empire supplied France with grain. The favourable attitude of the Ottoman government towards the French revolutionaries was not limited to foreign policy. It encompassed also the toleration of revolutionary alterations in diplomatic practice, as will be seen in Part II.

Ottoman efforts to end the war in Europe by mediating a general peace conference show that Sultan Selim III was truly interested in engaging actively in European diplomacy. Unfortunately, this offer was unanimously turned down by the belligerent powers. In 1795, the French government intended to assure the Sublime Porte that it would certainly be invited to a future general peace conference.¹²⁴

¹²⁰ Firges, *Großbritannien und das Osmanische Reich Ende des 18. Jahrhunderts*, 16–19.

¹²¹ Bacqué-Grammont, Kuneralp, and Hitzel, *Représentants permanents de la France en Turquie (1536–1991) et de la Turquie en France (1797–1991)*, 44–5.

¹²² Belissa, *Repenser l'ordre européen (1795–1802)*, 283.

¹²³ Bacqué-Grammont, Kuneralp, and Hitzel, *Représentants permanents de la France en Turquie (1536–1991) et de la Turquie en France (1797–1991)*, 44–5.

¹²⁴ Report, probably by Charles-Frédéric Reinhard, 11 March 1795, MAE, CP Turquie 190, fol. 319.

However, the Ottoman government was excluded from every peace congress of the revolutionary and Napoleonic era. Even the War of the Second Coalition (following the French Invasion of Egypt), in which the Ottomans actively took part, was concluded without an Ottoman plenipotentiary present at the peace conference of Amiens, in 1801–2.¹²⁵ Thus, when Selim III later ratified the Peace of Amiens, he merely acknowledged a *fait accompli*.

¹²⁵ Şakul, 'An Ottoman Global Moment', 430.

PART II

FROM PARIS TO ISTANBUL

*French Revolutionary Foreign Policy
and Diplomatic Practice*

4

Neglect or Refusal?

The Revolutionary Government's Attitude towards Franco-Ottoman Negotiations during the Terror

The old Committee of Public Safety had neglected the diplomatic and commercial affairs in the Levant to such a degree that an immense quantity of letters of this interesting correspondence from Constantinople and other places has been found, *unopened*, scattered in boxes that Robespierre had removed from the Committee . . . It is also known that at the time when the new members of the Committee came into office, an enormous number of other documents was discovered, abandoned in one corner of an apartment [in the Tuileries palace, seat of the Committee], which dated back more than a year.¹

So described, on 5 January 1795, Citizen Edme-Bonaventure Courtois, deputy of the National Convention, in his famous report on Robespierre's papers, the chaotic management of diplomacy during the Terror (5 September 1793–28 July 1794). This account may help us understand the conditions under which the administration of foreign affairs laboured during the height of revolutionary fervour. In a remote corner of an apartment of the Tuileries Palace, seat of the Committee of Public Safety, the central organ of the revolutionary government had stored boxes of unanswered and even unopened letters from the Ottoman Empire. Parts of this correspondence had also been found in Robespierre's private apartment, in various boxes he had taken home. The Committee of Public Safety was overburdened by the task of micro-managing even the most marginal activities of the central administration. It had to prioritize—and priority lay in organizing the war effort. Under such circumstances, it is not surprising that French government agents in the Levant waited in vain for effective guidance from Paris.

This chapter, and the two following, examine the effects that the regime change and the shift in political culture had on the practice of diplomacy. The present chapter first looks at how the central government in Paris directed its diplomats during this era, what it expected of them, and what stance the Jacobin Club in Paris took towards diplomatic negotiations with the Ottoman Empire. Chapter 5

¹ 'Convention nationale. Fin du rapport fait au nom de la commission chargée de l'examen des papiers trouvés chez Robespierre et ses complices . . .', *Moniteur universel*, No. 162, 2 March 1795. Emphasis in original.

analyses how the new political culture of the Revolution manifested itself in diplomatic practice, and then, in Chapter 6, French revolutionary propaganda and its purposes are considered.

These three chapters thus deal with three important questions. First, what influence did the ideology of the central government in Paris have on the administration of diplomacy? Secondly, how did French revolutionary ideology influence the practice of diplomacy on the ground? Thirdly, how far was revolutionary culture and ideology meant to be propagated through channels of diplomacy? Many scholars addressing the first question assume that ideological decisions of the revolutionary government had direct and compelling consequences for the conduct of diplomacy. The example of the French negotiations with the Ottoman Empire challenges this notion, as will become clear below. Some historians dealing with the second question have depicted revolutionary diplomats as ideological extremists who were ready to offend their counterparts and even to risk their own diplomatic success in order to push through their ideological principles. However, the Franco-Ottoman negotiations, especially during the Terror—arguably the most ideologically ‘charged’ phase of the Revolution—provide a significant counter-example. For the third question, likewise, a study of the Ottoman case provides interesting insights into French revolutionary propaganda, which are often not in line with the prevalent assumptions.

This enquiry into the influence of revolutionary political culture on diplomacy begins in Paris. What were the conditions under which the foreign policy administration worked during the first three years of the Republic? What consequences did the revolutionary government’s disregard for diplomacy during the Terror have for the diplomatic activities in the Ottoman Empire? Finally, what can be learned from the deliberations of the Paris Jacobins on Ottoman affairs?

THE ADMINISTRATION OF FRENCH REVOLUTIONARY FOREIGN POLICY

To understand the political conditions under which revolutionary French diplomacy in the Ottoman Empire was operating, it is necessary to address the administrative and ideological developments of French foreign policy in general. The overall impression of French revolutionary administration of foreign affairs correlates with the statement by deputy Courtois, quoted above. Between the suspension of the monarchy on 10 August 1792 and the end of the Terror, after 9 Thermidor II (27 July 1794), the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (later renamed the Commission of External Relations) was directed mainly by three persons: Lebrun (10 August 1792–21 June 1793), Deforgues (21 June 1793–2 April 1794), and Buchot (9 April 1794–3 November 1794). Lebrun was a protégé of Dumouriez, and consequently overthrown after the *Journées* of 31 May and 2 June 1793, when the Montagnards around Robespierre purged the National Convention and the

government of members of the Girondist faction.² Lebrun was executed half a year later, on 27 December 1793. His successor, Deforgues, was a Montagnard, but also a sympathizer of Danton. Therefore, he was arrested after Danton's fall, at the beginning of April 1794, and would have probably suffered the same fate as his predecessor, had he not been released after the events of 9 Thermidor.

The constant struggle of the different political factions in Paris had its effect on the organization of the executive branch of government. After the overthrow of the monarchy, the government was directed by an executive council, of which every minister was a member. This council provisionally took over all functions of the monarch. Thus, the letter of credence of Descorches, for example, was formulated in a style very similar to the credentials issued during the monarchy, except that it was signed not by Louis XVI, but by all members of the Provisional Executive Council.³ During the course of the summer of 1793, the Provisional Executive Council became, in practice, subordinate to the Committee of Public Safety of the National Convention. The Convention, which originally had been elected to enact a republican Constitution, took effective control of the executive through the Committee of Public Safety.⁴ Although a Constitution had been drawn up by 24 June 1793, it was never implemented. Instead, on 10 October 1793, the provisional French government was declared 'revolutionary until peace', which meant that the Constitution was suspended, the Convention would not dissolve to be replaced by a constitutional parliament, and the Committee of Public Safety was now considered to be the government, ruling with exceptional and ever-increasing powers.⁵ It was under this rule that the policies of the Terror, with all their horrors and sufferings, came into being. The Law of 14 Frimaire (4 December 1793) determined the way in which the revolutionary government would govern the country. 'The principle animating it was extreme centralization.'⁶ The Committee of Public Safety tried to control practically every aspect of government, even in matters of very limited importance.⁷ French revolutionaries were highly suspicious of the executive power concentrated in the ministries, which were considered remnants of the 'despotism' of the old regime. All ministers were, therefore, obliged to report to the Committee on a regular basis.⁸ The direction of foreign policy was transferred directly to the Committee: 'Concerning foreign policy, the Committee of Public Safety is in charge of [all] major operations in diplomacy, and will

² For the whole period between the Fall of the Girondins and 9 Thermidor, see Robert Palmer's still highly recommended classic, Robert R. Palmer, *Twelve Who Ruled: The Year of the Terror in the French Revolution* (Princeton, 2005 [1941]).

³ A copy of Descorches's letter of credence, dated 27 December 1792, can be found in CADN, Constantinople, Ambassade, Série B3, unfoliated. See also Figure 5 in Chapter 5.

⁴ Masson, *Le Département des affaires étrangères pendant la Révolution*, 285–6.

⁵ Palmer, *Twelve Who Ruled*, 75.

⁶ Doyle, *The Oxford History of the French Revolution*, 263.

⁷ For a comprehensive study of the internal structures and the functioning of the Committee of Public Safety, see Raphael Matta-Duvignau, *Gouverner, administrer révolutionnairement. Le Comité de salut public (6 avril 1793–brumaire an IV)* (Paris, 2013).

⁸ Masson, *Le Département des affaires étrangères pendant la Révolution*, 299–300.

deal directly with everything that is related to these same operations' (Section 3, Article 1).⁹

The Committee of Public Safety later added specific details to this regulation, determining that: credential letters were henceforth to be signed by the members of the Committee; the instructions given to diplomats had to be approved by the Committee; and the Committee would correspond directly with foreign governments.¹⁰ The Law of 14 Frimaire had thus reduced the foreign ministry, and indeed all ministries, to mere instruments of the ruling Committee. Consequently, the ministries were renamed *commissions* and prohibited from acting on their own initiative. Now, their sole purpose was to execute the orders of the Committee of Public Safety. Thus, on 1 April 1794 (12 Germinal II), the foreign ministry became the Commission of External Relations, and its minister a *commissaire*. The Committee of Public Safety developed its own administrative structures for the preparation of foreign policy decisions, which were then communicated to the former foreign ministry.¹¹ This organization was gradually modified after 9 Thermidor, and with the coming into force of the Constitution of the Directorate on 2 November 1795, the French Republic witnessed the comeback of the ministries.

Looking at the internal developments within the foreign ministry, it is evident that since the tenure of Dumouriez it had been in a constant state of transition with regard to personnel and organization. Between 1790 and 1795, it moved its residence three times.¹² The French diplomatic historian Frédéric Masson, a severe critic of revolutionary politics, described the foreign ministry of 1793 as largely disintegrated. The number of employees had grown from forty-one in 1789 to seventy-eight in June 1793. Masson presented most of the new arrivals as incompetents: 'The ministries had become the refuge of all inabilities, an asylum against military conscription, and the cash cow of the patriots.'¹³ What did the employees do? They enjoyed their lives.¹⁴ Foreign Minister Deforgues, who held office from June 1793 to April 1794, tried to keep a low profile, to isolate his ministry from the revolutionary upheaval surrounding it.¹⁵ Therefore, very little was actually done in the ministry without express orders of the Committee of Public Safety, which was effectively ruling the country during this period, in the name and with the approval of the National Convention.¹⁶ The Committee of Public Safety, however, was fully occupied with preventing the collapse of the Republic. Although one of the Committee's twelve members, Bertrand Barère, made foreign affairs his area of expertise, the foreign ministry remained largely inactive, so that Deforgues could be

⁹ Decree concerning the organization of the revolutionary government, 4 December 1793, in *Archives parlementaires. De 1787 à 1860, Série 1* (Paris, 1912), vol. 80, 632.

¹⁰ Decree of the Committee of Public Safety, 20 March 1794, quoted in Masson, *Le Département des affaires étrangères pendant la Révolution*, 301–2.

¹¹ Degros, 'La Révolution', 288.

¹² Ibid., 287, 292, 301–2.

¹³ In contemporary language, the term 'patriot' was often used to denote sympathizers of the French Revolution.

¹⁴ Masson, *Le Département des affaires étrangères pendant la Révolution*, 257.

¹⁵ Ibid., 294.

¹⁶ Ibid., 285–6.

denounced by his leftist critic Hébert not as 'ministre des Affaires étrangères', but as 'ministre étranger aux affaires'.¹⁷

BARÈRE'S IMPRACTICABLE PRINCIPLES OF DIPLOMACY

The principles of foreign policy were often modified and reformulated during the French Revolution and, in fact, there was not much consensus about them during the whole period. The republican Constitution of 1793, which was enacted on 24 June, but never put into effect, declared that the French people were the natural friend and ally of all free peoples (Article 118) and that it would not interfere in the government of other nations (Article 119).¹⁸

Three months later, the Committee of Public Safety decreed its five 'provisional bases of diplomacy'.¹⁹ The first basic principle was that during the war and until the implementation of the Constitution, the Republic would have neither ambassadors nor ministers plenipotentiary,²⁰ but only secret agents, legation secretaries, and chargés d'affaires. This decision meant that no diplomat residing in a foreign country would be able to conduct any international negotiations of significance. This is a good example of the mistrust many French revolutionaries entertained towards powerful institutions. A diplomat with full authority to represent and negotiate for his country was apparently too powerful not to be suspect. Exceptions were made for the 'two free peoples', the Americans and the Swiss, to whom the French government would send ambassadors (fourth basic principle). However, those diplomats who had been sent out in an official capacity, like Descorches, were de facto not recalled and they kept their official status.²¹ Suspicion was also the motive behind the second and third basic principles, determining that all diplomatic employees should be put under scrutiny, to either 'reform' or recall them, and that diplomatic agents would henceforth not receive any written instructions for their missions, but would be briefed before their departure. The fifth principle stipulated that the government would not negotiate with foreign diplomats who did not officially recognize the French Republic.

The significance of the decree on the basic principles of revolutionary diplomacy is unclear. Eminent scholars, such as Robert Palmer and Bailey Stone, concluded that during the Terror 'diplomatic relations virtually ceased. Ministers and ambassadors were recalled from their posts, except those in Switzerland and the United

¹⁷ Ibid., 302. This play on words, it seems, was made rather frequently in French history.

¹⁸ Ibid., 296.

¹⁹ 'Provisional bases of diplomacy', decreed by the Committee of Public Safety, 24 September 1793, François-Alphonse Aulard (ed.), *Recueil des actes du Comité de salut public. 22 September 1793–24 October 1793*, 28 vols. (Paris, 1894), vol. 7, 28–9.

²⁰ Ambassador and minister plenipotentiary are the two highest diplomatic ranks. Both are invested with full powers to represent their sovereign (hence pleni-potentiary). See Anderson, *The Rise of Modern Diplomacy*, 84.

²¹ Martin, 'La Diplomatie en Révolution', vol. 2, 578, 1026.

States'.²² This statement is obviously wrong, since neither Descorches nor his colleague in the Kingdom of Denmark, Grouvelle, were recalled during the period.²³ According to Marc Belissa, 'far from having disappeared under the Convention, French diplomats had multiplied and the diplomatic structure had become increasingly complex'.²⁴ The problem for French revolutionary diplomats was not that they were recalled, but that they were not accredited at the governments they were sent to. As a reaction to this, more and more French diplomats were sent out in without official status, which can be seen as a measure to facilitate secret negotiations.²⁵

Hitherto most scholars who mentioned the 'provisional bases of diplomacy' have not investigated their actual application, but presented them as the binding ground rules for Robespierist foreign policy.²⁶ As the Ottoman case demonstrates, this generalization does not match the historical facts. The misjudgement probably originates from an overestimation of the decree's implementation. Most of its stipulations were rather impractical. Revoking the authorizations of diplomats to negotiate on behalf of the government, especially in such distant places as Istanbul, made very little sense.²⁷ It is also uncertain whether the advantage of a higher level of secrecy outweighed the great inconvenience for French diplomats of having no written instructions on their missions. Moreover, it is doubtful, to say the least, that the lengthy instructions for government agents who were sent to the Ottoman Empire after September 1793 were really only meant to be read and memorized in Paris. Finally, if the republican government refused to deal with diplomats of states who did not recognize the French Republic, how could the French envoy in Istanbul still be allowed to negotiate an alliance with the Ottoman Empire, which had not officially recognized the new regime? (The same problem would also arise for the ongoing negotiations with Denmark and Sweden.)

Other facts also cast doubt on the significance of the decree of 24 September. If the number of signatures on a decree corresponds roughly to its importance, we may conclude that this decree was probably of minor significance, since it bears the

²² Palmer, *Twelve Who Ruled*, 59. Palmer depicted the negotiations with the Ottoman Empire as secret, which clearly they were not from the French perspective (104). Cf. Stone, *Reinterpreting the French Revolution*, 172.

²³ On Grouvelle's mission, see Rémusat, 'Un sans-culotte à la cour de Danemark'.

²⁴ Belissa, 'War and Diplomacy (1792–1795)', 430–1.

²⁵ Virginie Martin suggests that consequently the decree of 24 September 1794 should be seen in the light of the French government's efforts to make possible unofficial negotiations. See Martin, 'La Diplomatie en Révolution', vol. 2, 176–7.

²⁶ e.g. Jacques Droz, *Histoire diplomatique de 1648 à 1919* (Paris, 1952), 202; Linda Frey and Marsha Frey, '“The Reign of the Charlatans Is Over”: The French Revolutionary Attack on Diplomatic Practice', *The Journal of Modern History*, 65(4) (1993), 706–44, 719; Matta-Duvignau, *Gouverner, administrer révolutionnairement*, 186–8. Albert Sorel even presents the decree as Robespierre's creation, without leaving any hint why he came to this conclusion. He also gives the date of this decree as 16 September 1793, while Aulard's edition of the *Actes du Comité de salut public* (vol. 7), published three years after Sorel's book, dates the decree 24 September 1793. See Sorel, *L'Europe et la Révolution française*, vol. 3, 524; Aulard (ed.), *Recueil des actes du Comité de salut public*, vol. 7, 28.

²⁷ As already mentioned, not only Descorches, but also the envoy to Denmark, Grouvelle, was not recalled although according to the decree he should have been.

signatures of only two of the Committee of Public Safety's twelve members: Barère, whose hand had penned the document, and Prieur de la Marne. At least three Committee members had signed each of the other decrees of that day. All nine members who were present on 24 September had signed a decree ordering the navy minister to enhance the military strength of the fleet (Jeanbon Saint-André, Hérault, Carnot, Robespierre, C.-A. Prieur, Prieur de la Marne, Barère, Billaud-Varenne, Collot d'Herbois).²⁸ Only one of the six decrees recorded that day bore no signatures.²⁹

It is, furthermore, questionable whether the government notified the legation in Istanbul about this decree. The editors of the government-related newspaper *Moniteur universel*, which published many decrees of the ruling Committee and the National Convention, did not include this one in any of their issues.³⁰ Even more striking is the fact that no reference to this decree can be found in the records of the French foreign ministry concerning the Ottoman Empire. In the foreign minister's letters to Descorches of 7, 18, and 26 October 1793, no allusion is made to the 'provisional bases of diplomacy'.³¹ The foreign ministry's holdings normally contain copies of circular letters notifying its diplomats about all decrees concerning foreign relations. Thus, for example, the decision to send 4 million livres to support Descorches's negotiations (see Chapter 2), which was decreed less than three weeks after the new principles of diplomacy, can be found in copy here.³² It is true that the general chaos in the administration of foreign policy may explain the absence of the decree of 24 September from the files.³³ However, it seems more likely that the new basic principles of diplomacy were never forwarded to the French envoy in Istanbul.

CANNON DIPLOMACY: REVOLUTIONARY APPROACHES TO FOREIGN POLICY

Be that as it may, it seems clear that the decrees of the revolutionary government alone are not sufficient to judge its disposition towards diplomacy. Their implementation needs to be taken into account as well. In fact, it is rather misleading to

²⁸ Aulard (ed.), *Recueil des actes du Comité de salut public*, vol. 7, 30–1. Another decision of the day authorized the Citizen Claude Chappe to install a 'telegraphic machine' (the famous optical Chappe-telegraph) on all towers and buildings he considered suitable and arranged for the compensation of all affected proprietors. Five members of the committee had signed this decree. See *Ibid.*, 29–30.

²⁹ The decree without signatures simply ordered the postmaster of Paris to provide three horses for six o'clock the next morning. See *Ibid.*, 28.

³⁰ The official *Bulletin des lois* was not created yet. Its establishment was decreed on 14 Frimaire II (4 December 1793).

³¹ MAE, CP Turquie 186, fols. 74–5, 132–5, 226–7.

³² Decree of the Committee of Public Safety, 11 October 1793, MAE, CP Turquie 186, fol. 101; see also Aulard (ed.), *Recueil des actes du Comité de salut public*, vol. 7, 360. This decree, signed by Billaud Varenne, explicitly orders the continuation of alliance negotiations with the Ottoman Empire.

³³ I also consulted without success the records of the French legation in Istanbul, which are now in Nantes and which are generally less complete than the archives of the foreign ministry in Paris. Just like the other incoming correspondence from Paris, the decree should have been placed in the following file: CADN, Constantinople, Ambassade, Série B1.

speak of the government's disposition towards diplomacy, since the government of the Terror had no unified position on this. The minimal consensus was that diplomacy needed to be 'regenerated' and that the Republic could not pursue the diplomacy of the *ancien régime*, with all its intrigues and machinations. But how far this regeneration ought to be pushed, and what it consisted of, was not clearly established. Furthermore, when looking at the rhetoric of revolutionary politicians who rejected diplomacy in principle, it is important to remember that the Republic was involved in a life-or-death struggle. In summer or autumn of 1793, there was very little to negotiate about with the enemy.

On 25 August 1793, Bertrand Barère gave a speech at the National Convention, in which the unofficial coordinator of the ruling Committee's foreign policies declared that the old diplomacy was dead, and that the new one had to be the diplomacy of cannons and of victory.³⁴ The term 'cannon diplomacy' became a catch phrase and was used after 9 Thermidor to denounce the foreign policy of the Robespierriest Committee of Public Safety.³⁵ However, was not the complete abandonment of diplomacy in favour of warfare a viable option only with regard to enemy states? From the perspective of the French government in 1793, it made sense to achieve some bargaining power by improving their own military position before they started negotiations with members of the anti-French Coalition, who themselves had refused to negotiate with the Republic.³⁶ Can we, therefore, assume that cannon diplomacy was not directed against neutral powers, but only against the enemies of the Republic?

The distinction made between neutral and inimical states is crucial for the understanding of revolutionary diplomacy during the Terror, and much more so, I would argue, than the ideological distinction made between monarchies and republics.³⁷ Barère expressed his views in this regard in a speech addressing the members of the National Convention, given on 3 January 1794:

The nature [of things] associated you with the Italic peoples [and] invited you . . . to form an alliance with the Dardanelles. It is well known to the divan that republics never marry and that Vienna can no longer usurp France by means of Austrian women³⁸ . . . Let our diplomacy during the Revolution be entirely in the interests of our commerce and fidelity to our treaties regarding the neutral powers; in the founding of cannon [and] making of rifles . . . regarding the continental powers; [and] in the ports and arsenals . . . regarding the maritime powers.³⁹

Italians and Ottomans as allies, commercial relations with all neutral states, and war with the Continental and maritime enemies of France; this does not sound like a hostile stance towards all countries but the republics. Barère's statement complies

³⁴ *Archives parlementaires. De 1787 à 1860, Série 1* (Paris, 1908), vol. 73, 22.

³⁵ Cf. Degros, 'La Révolution', 281.

³⁶ Martin, 'La Diplomatie en Révolution', vol. 2, 578–81. Cf. Jean Gros, *Le Comité de salut public de la Convention nationale* (Paris, 1893), 318–19.

³⁷ See also Martin, 'La Diplomatie en Révolution', vol. 2, 263.

³⁸ This is, as in Chapter 2, an allusion to the marriage of Louis XVI to Marie Antoinette.

³⁹ *Archives parlementaires. De 1787 à 1860, Série 1* (Paris, 1913), vol. 82, 615.

much more with Bailey Stone's assessment that even during the Terror 'ideology and pragmatism could coexist harmoniously enough—at least in the domain of foreign relations'.⁴⁰

Nevertheless, Barère was at the same time also the leading exponent of a political current that considered diplomatic negotiations and political treaties generally as superfluous—and professional diplomats even more so.⁴¹ One of his protégés, a certain Citizen Ducher,⁴² who wrote a number of commentaries on foreign policy for the *Moniteur universel*, expressed this opinion in early October 1793 in an article entitled 'The Rout of the Old Diplomacy'.⁴³ Furthermore, he suggested that the rejection of old regime diplomacy would destabilize the old monarchical order of Europe:

The Revolution in France has shattered the political system of Europe, the interests and the [mutual] guarantee of the great powers [...] [Diplomatic treaties] formed the political and feudal chain [that joined] those dozen individuals who hold empires as their fiefdoms and nations as their tenants. This chain is broken: the French axe has struck the decisive link. The crowns of Madrid, Turin, Vienna, Berlin, The Hague⁴⁴... that of England is no longer guaranteed by Louis Capet⁴⁵ [...] We are no longer bound by the treaties of 1648, 1718, 38, 48, 56, and the *Pacte de famille*.⁴⁶ Let us end the diplomacy of the *livre rouge*,⁴⁷ of gifts, of pensions, [and] subsidies. The balance of crowns of Europe has lost its equilibrium; let us not get into contact with their politics.⁴⁸

Ducher presents the traditional system of diplomacy as a means by which the monarchs of Europe secured their control over their territories. Therefore, he pleaded for a retreat from this system, which in consequence also meant ruling out any alliances—especially with monarchical states.⁴⁹ But this view, however

⁴⁰ Stone, *Reinterpreting the French Revolution*, 174.

⁴¹ Linda and Marsha Frey have depicted the outright rejection of political negotiations and treaties as a general attitude among French revolutionaries. I disagree with this assessment. See Frey and Frey, "The Reign of the Charlatans Is Over", 717–18.

⁴² G. J. A. Ducher, 'a man of such obscure origins that he will forever be known only by his three initials', had filled two minor consular posts in the United States before he returned to France in 1790 and became involved in revolutionary politics, drafting the French Navigation Act of 1793. See Peter Hill, *French Perceptions of the Early American Republic: 1783–1793* (Independence Square, Philadelphia, 1988), 17.

⁴³ G. J. A. Ducher, 'Déroute de la vieille diplomatie', *Moniteur universel*, No. 276, 3 October 1793.

⁴⁴ Technically, the Netherlands was a republic, but Ducher refers to the stadtholder as quasi-king.

⁴⁵ i.e. Louis XVI.

⁴⁶ *Pacte de famille* refers to the alliance treaties between the Bourbon Kings of Spain and France.

⁴⁷ *Livre rouge* refers to the register in which the secret expenses of the French monarchy were recorded. Analogously, *diplomatie du livre rouge* in this context certainly means diplomacy through corruption. Cf. William Doyle, 'The French Revolution and the Abolition of Nobility', in Hamish Scott (ed.), *Cultures of Power in Europe during the Long Eighteenth Century* (Cambridge, 2007), 289–303, 298.

⁴⁸ Ducher, 'Déroute de la vieille diplomatie', *Moniteur universel*, No. 276, 3 October 1793. Unbracketed ellipses are in the original.

⁴⁹ It is not without a certain irony that in early 1794, Ducher left France on a diplomatic mission to Algiers. See Windler, *La Diplomatie comme expérience de l'autre*, 266.

strongly shared by Barère,⁵⁰ was apparently not the opinion of the unofficial head of the Committee of Public Safety, Robespierre.⁵¹ To Robespierre, negotiating an alliance with the Ottomans was an important goal of foreign policy for the Republic, as a speech at the National Convention on 17 November 1793 reveals:

The Turk, necessarily the enemy of our enemies, useful and loyal ally of France, neglected by the French government, circumvented by the intrigues of the British cabinet, has so far kept a neutrality that is more disastrous to his own interests than to those of the French Republic. Nevertheless, it seems that he is ready to awaken . . .⁵²

In this speech, Robespierre rejected any war of conquest, or the liberation of foreign peoples.⁵³ The leading figure of the Terror regime was no advocate of a 'world revolution', nor did he believe in foreign relations without political negotiation. It is possible, therefore, to assume that within the Committee of Public Safety there was no consensus on the conduct of foreign policy, except for the rejection of negotiations with the enemy. Moreover, since Barère stayed in power after the fall of Robespierre (albeit not for very long), his inimical position towards diplomatic negotiations continued to influence foreign policy until late 1794. In a long report he delivered at the National Convention, a few days after 9 Thermidor, he put forward the idea that diplomats were as unnecessary as priests—considering the violent de-Christianization during the Revolution, this was a rather blatant threat to the diplomatic corps:

You know, citizens, that since the war, in which the Republic fights the coalition of tyrants so successfully, our ambassadors are the [French] armies and our diplomatic instruments the cannons, bayonets, and powder . . . Our relations with neutral nations are more economic and commercial than political. The bravery of the republicans has changed the diplomacy of Europe. The mendacious and slick art of the plenipotentiaries can only suit monarchies; and the priests of diplomacy can no more exist among us than the priests of fanaticism.⁵⁴ The decrees of national opinion have decided in favour of freedom and equality. The French Revolution will bring with it, in its impetuous and terrific march, revolution throughout Europe. The old equilibrium of powers and alliances, that famous balance, this political charlatanry, is broken.⁵⁵

As we can see, Barère, like his protégé Ducher, believed that the rejection of classical diplomacy would destabilize the old monarchical order of Europe and thus facilitate

⁵⁰ Cf. Barère at the National Convention, 1 August 1794, 'Convention nationale. Suite de la séance permanente du 9 thermidor, Le 14 thermidor', *Moniteur universel*, No. 315, 2 August 1794.

⁵¹ Marc Belissa, 'Robespierre et la guerre', in Michel Biard, Philippe Bourdin, and Maximilien de Robespierre (eds.), *Robespierre. Portraits croisés* (Paris, 2012), 95–107, 104–7.

⁵² Robespierre at the National Convention, 17 November 1793, *Archives parlementaires. De 1787 à 1860, Série 1* (Paris, 1911), vol. 79, 380.

⁵³ This was also the tenor of a decree of the Committee of Public Safety, promulgated the following day. See Godechot, *La Grande Nation*, 78.

⁵⁴ *Prêtres du fanatisme* was a common designation for Catholic priests.

⁵⁵ Barère at the National Convention, 1 August 1794, 'Convention nationale. Suite de la séance permanente du 9 thermidor, Le 14 thermidor', *Moniteur universel*, No. 315, 2 August 1794.

revolutions elsewhere. He repeated his opinion in another speech on 18 August 1794 and it seems that his views did not meet any real opposition before his resignation from the Committee of Public Safety, on 1 September 1794.⁵⁶ The turning point, marking the beginning of the renunciation of Barère's cannon diplomacy, were two addresses by deputy Jean Lambert Tallien, one of the leaders of the conspiracy of 9 Thermidor. On 17 October and 4 December 1794, he spoke out against rejecting diplomatic negotiations entirely. In his opinion, warfare and negotiations had to go hand in hand:

I know the question about the principles that should guide us in future political negotiations is a big issue to deal with. Citizens, it is time that the Republic finally resumes the place in the balance of Europe that belongs to it; it must have an attitude as grand as its principles. It has been said, I know: a powerful republic like ours only negotiates with its enemies by cannon shots. But whatever may have been said, a republic can have a different diplomacy than this; and in pure hands, this latter can be a great help to the former.⁵⁷

Let us assist the generous efforts of our brothers in arms, let us fight the war with vigour; but let us at the same time behave towards the powers that have not entered the Coalition, in the way they have behaved towards us; let us thus unite force and wisdom, war and diplomacy.⁵⁸

Tallien's addresses marked the beginning of a dramatic shift away from a foreign policy strategy that effectively rejected negotiation (at least rhetorically) and aimed at warfare against France's enemies and solely commercial relations with neutral powers. The foreign policy objective of Barère and those who thought like him was to remove France entirely from the diplomatic system of Europe. Now, France was supposed to reclaim its rightful place: that is, the one it had occupied before the Revolution. This claim—that the French Republic should hold the same position as the French monarchy—became a principle of diplomacy after 9 Thermidor (see Chapter 5).

After Barère's resignation, it did not take long for his cannon diplomacy to be fully discredited. On 5 January, deputy Courtois, whose quotation began this chapter, commented on Barère's role in foreign policy during the rule of Robespierre's Committee of Public Safety: 'Barère [said] that our diplomacy should consist only of cannon shots; and these inept politicians have not realized that one cannot wage war without negotiating at the same time! How [on earth] was France able to resist so many combined scourges?'⁵⁹

⁵⁶ Barère at the National Convention, 18 August 1794, 'Convention nationale. Séance du 30 thermidor', *Moniteur universel*, No. 331, 18 August 1794.

⁵⁷ Tallien at the National Convention, 17 October 1794, 'Convention nationale. Suite de la séance du 26 vendémiaire', *Moniteur universel*, No. 30, 21 October 1794.

⁵⁸ Tallien at the National Convention, 4 December 1794, 'Convention nationale. Suite de la séance du 14 frimaire', *Moniteur universel*, No. 77, 7 December 1794.

⁵⁹ 'Convention nationale. Fin du rapport fait au nom de la commission chargée de l'examen des papiers trouvés chez Robespierre et ses complices...', *Moniteur universel*, No. 162, 2 March 1795.

CANNON DIPLOMACY? PARIS AND THE OTTOMAN NEGOTIATIONS DURING THE TERROR

The period of cannon diplomacy did not last for long. It began in the second half of 1793 and ended in the second half of 1794. Furthermore, while there was a consensus in the Committee of Public Safety that cannon diplomacy meant no negotiations with the enemy, when it came to diplomatic relations with neutral states the ruling Committee did not speak with one voice, as the previous sections have shown. How did this disagreement over a crucial question of foreign policy affect the ongoing negotiations for a Franco-Ottoman alliance? Diplomatic historians have often downplayed the very fact that the diplomatic corps continued to negotiate with neutral powers, even when diplomacy with inimical powers ceased to exist.⁶⁰ Many followed Albert Sorel, who—while describing how negotiations with Denmark, Sweden, and the Ottoman Empire continued—concluded nonetheless: ‘In fact, there were no more negotiations.’⁶¹

It is true that even though French negotiations with the Ottoman Empire (and with other neutral states) were not stopped, they were greatly hampered by the French government’s inability to provide sufficient guidance to what was left of the diplomatic corps. The Committee of Public Safety often failed to issue orders and the reports of diplomatic agents were left unanswered. Sometimes, Descorches would receive not a single letter from his superiors for several months.⁶² In 1794, the government in Paris sent no significant instructions to Descorches between mid-January and early July. Foreign Minister Deforgues was still preparing answers and instructions, but it seems that often nobody in the ruling Committee would read and approve them.⁶³ When he did correspond with his diplomats, Deforgues’s letters were mostly without any instructions, which made fruitful negotiations difficult.⁶⁴

When Deforgues was imprisoned and replaced by Philibert Buchot, in April 1794, things did not change for the better. The two historians Masson and Sorel give an extremely unfavourable description of the new diplomat-in-chief, quoting from the memoirs of his subordinate and successor Miot:

His ignorance, his vile manners, his stupidity went beyond anything one could imagine... One could never find him in his office, and when it was essential for him to sign a legalization—the sole activity to which he had reduced his duties—one

⁶⁰ e.g. Droz, *Histoire diplomatique de 1648 à 1919*, 198.

⁶¹ Sorel, *L’Europe et la Révolution française*, vol. 3, 524. This point was challenged only recently by Virginie Martin, who studied French diplomacy in Italy, see Martin, ‘La Diplomatie en Révolution’, vol. 2.

⁶² This was clearly not only a matter of the remoteness of Istanbul. Verninac, during his negotiations for an armed neutrality with the Swedish envoy (conducted in nearby Switzerland), also complained that he did not receive sufficient and timely instructions. See Feuillat, ‘Un projet d’alliance monarchique sous la Terreur’, 238.

⁶³ Sorel, *L’Europe et la Révolution française*, vol. 3, 524.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, vol. 4, 64–5.

had to go and extract it from him at the billiard table of the Café Hardy, where he usually passed his days.⁶⁵

Sorel adds: 'He was perfectly apt for the role Robespierre had assigned to him. With diplomacy being reduced to nothing, this insignificant man could be placed at [the head of] the foreign ministry.'⁶⁶ Sorel's assessment is misleading in two respects, however: the Committee of Public Safety (and especially Robespierre) could have no interest in a dysfunctional administration of foreign affairs. If the whole Committee had been convinced of the expendability of the foreign ministry, its members could have abolished it altogether, instead of choosing an incompetent minister on purpose. Furthermore, it is very difficult to judge Buchot's skill without considering the exceptionally difficult circumstances of his tenure. Even if Buchot had been the most talented foreign minister of his age, he probably would have had no chance to give proof of his abilities. Long before he took up his post, the administration of foreign policy was already in utter chaos, split up between the foreign ministry and the Committee of Public Safety. In the third week after he had taken office, for example, Buchot stumbled over a considerable number of documents for the use of the ruling Committee, which had never made it to their destination:

In various reports . . . concerning Sweden, Denmark, Poland, Algiers, Tunis, Constantinople, Venice, and Geneva, I referred to several documents as being filed at the Committee of Public Safety. I had reason to believe this, because the respective instructions, draft decrees, reports, and memoranda had been handed over . . . to my predecessor in order [for him] to put them before the eyes of the Committee of Public Safety . . . Today, however, I discovered that all the files . . . were still in the briefcase of my predecessor . . .⁶⁷

Interestingly, in the midst of the so-called Great Terror, three weeks before the fall of Robespierre, on 27 July 1794 (9 Thermidor), and only nine days after the victory at the Battle of Fleurus, Buchot finally broke the French government's silence and sent a long letter to Descorches. It is probably no coincidence that this dispatch was composed only a few days after the crucial victory of Fleurus had lifted the military emergency that had been threatening the French Republic's existence since 1793. It seems that now, after having curbed the immediate danger for the country, the Committee of Public Safety was finally at leisure to spend a few moments on diplomatic affairs—without, however, having a clear foreign policy strategy. In the letter, the commissaire of external relations excused his long silence with the great activities instigated by the Committee of Public Safety, which encompassed every aspect of government—and with the argument that even the government's silence was purposeful:

If, under these circumstances, the Committee of Public Safety, [being] responsible for managing all the departments of government, seemed for a moment to lose sight of the

⁶⁵ Miot de Méliot and André François, *Mémoires*, vol. 1, quoted in Masson, *Le Département des affaires étrangères pendant la Révolution*, 312.

⁶⁶ Sorel, *L'Europe et la Révolution française*, vol. 4, 67.

⁶⁷ Commissaire of External Relations to Committee of Public Safety, 7 May 1794, MAE, CP Turquie 187, fol. 503.

affairs of a few individuals in some remote places; if some [government] agent believed he could complain about the kind of neglect in which he believed he had been left, . . . only one word of response shall suffice: a government which has planned and implemented so many extensive operations, proves to be wise even in its delays and far-sighted even in its silence.⁶⁸

Buchot's dispatch consisted of a public and a confidential part. The public part, intended for propagandistic purposes, reports the glorious victories of the French armies and the achievements of the revolutionary government in the interior, including the 'purification of morals'.⁶⁹

Although this depiction of a peaceful, prosperous, and harmonious country (which, in fact, had just experienced some of the most murderous weeks of the Revolution) deserves a more elaborate analysis, it is the confidential part of the dispatch that is of greater interest in this context. It contains a few instructions that can help us to understand how a government committed to cannon diplomacy intended to negotiate with a potential ally. Buchot ordered Descorches to deliver the public letter to the Ottoman government. The decisive victories of the Republic alone were supposed to be convincing enough to move the Sublime Porte finally towards a French alliance. Was it not also for the conservation of the Ottoman Empire that France was going to war?⁷⁰

These are, citizen, the only further instructions I can give you. The Committee of Public Safety, infused with this great and sublime idea that cannon diplomacy is the most appropriate [form of diplomacy] for the Republic, [and] that among the neutrals, only those who consider their interests inseparably linked to the final triumph of our [cause], and who anticipate our wishes [and] our proposals, are worthy of being our friends and allies, has not yet taken a final resolution regarding our external relations. However, I have the impression that [the Committee is] inclined to think that the moment of so many victories is . . . the most suitable for us to clarify [our position] and to come to an understanding with our friends.⁷¹

This was the most Buchot could provide to Descorches in the way of instructions for the pending negotiations. Every order he could give to the French envoy in Istanbul had to come from the Committee of Public Safety.⁷² If the Committee did not give any directions on how to proceed in the negotiations, then the envoy was all on his own. This state of things may raise the question whether the Committee of Public Safety's neglect of guidance can be interpreted as outright rejection of diplomacy. I doubt this assumption. If there had been a consensus in the ruling Committee on stopping Descorches's negotiations, why did it not give express orders to that effect? Instead, it authorized Buchot to confirm Descorches's mandate, as well as the instructions he had received from foreign minister Deforgues. Buchot did, furthermore, express his satisfaction with the envoy's work.⁷³

⁶⁸ Commissaire of External Relations to Descorches, 5 July 1794, MAE, CP Turquie 188, fol. 257.

⁶⁹ Ibid., fol. 256.

⁷⁰ Ibid., fol. 250.

⁷¹ Ibid., fol. 248.

⁷² Ibid., fol. 248.

⁷³ Ibid., fols. 248–9.

We can therefore conclude that the ‘cannon diplomacy’ of the Committee of Public Safety first and foremost meant refusing to negotiate with the powers hostile to the French Republic: ‘As for our enemies, we have never applied and do not know any other method to negotiate with them than the cannon. The instinct of patriotism indicates to all French people those with whom we must make neither truce nor peace until their total destruction . . .’⁷⁴ Further, it meant forcing the enemies of France into submission and convincing potential allies, through a demonstration of military power, that it was better to join the cause of the Republic than to stay apart. Although the French government neglected the direction of diplomatic affairs, there was no consensus on rejecting diplomacy altogether. This deadlock was eventually broken after 9 Thermidor. Even before Barère’s resignation, Buchot announced to Descorches:

[Since] the beneficial revolution of 9 Thermidor, the National Convention is concerned with a reorganization of the revolutionary government . . . I am delighted to announce to you that we have reason to hope that as a consequence of the [new] system which will be adopted, the commission of which I am in charge will finally emerge from its long inaction.⁷⁵

THE PARIS JACOBINS AND CONVENTIONAL DIPLOMACY

Ideological approaches to foreign policy, it seems, were never able to subdue realpolitik altogether. One of the most fascinating examples was the deliberations of the Jacobin Club of Paris, one of the hotbeds of revolutionary fervour, at the beginning of October 1793, the time when the French government was declared revolutionary until peace. A few weeks earlier, the republican opposition to Descorches in Istanbul, led by the French envoy’s opponent Hénin, had founded a political club and demanded affiliation with the Jacobin Club of Paris.⁷⁶ From the very beginning, political clubs had been an essential part of French revolutionary political culture.⁷⁷ Their correspondence network was crucial for the dissemination of revolutionary ideology all over France and their members were the key figures of revolutionary action at every level of society.⁷⁸ What is important in this context is that political clubs, especially those of the capital, had an immense influence on

⁷⁴ Ibid., fol. 249.

⁷⁵ Commissaire of External Relations to Descorches, 15 August 1794, MAE, CP Turquie 188, fol. 442.

⁷⁶ Similar clubs had been established in Izmir and Aleppo. See Henin to Foreign Minister, 16 August 1793, MAE, CP Turquie 185, fol. 146. The club in Istanbul first requested an affiliation with the Society of Sans-culottes in Paris and asked for their support for an affiliation with the Jacobin Club of Paris. See Club of Constantinople to Society of Sans-culottes of Paris, 12 September 1793, MAE, CP Turquie 185, fol. 360.

⁷⁷ Isser Woloch, ‘A Revolution in Political Culture’, in Peter McPhee (ed.), *A Companion to the French Revolution* (Oxford, 2013), 437–53, 444.

⁷⁸ On the history of the Jacobin Clubs, see e.g. Michael L. Kennedy, *The Jacobin Clubs in the French Revolution*, 3 vols. (Princeton, New York, 1982–2000).

French politics. The most influential of these clubs resided at a former Dominican convent in the Rue Saint-Honoré in Paris. The first Dominican convent in Paris was in the Rue St Jacques; thus the Dominicans were also called Jacobins, and the club, which met at the old convent, became known as the Jacobin Club. During the Terror, this 'club officially monopolized political life, distributed "the good word", made and unmade reputations, and condemned without appeal the undecided, the suspects, the traitors, the prevaricators'.⁷⁹

It was at this forum of revolutionary politics that the only public debate on Franco-Ottoman relations during the Terror took place, revolving around the affiliation request of the 'Club of Constantinople'. What makes this controversy especially interesting for this study is that it was a debate touching on three key questions of French revolutionary foreign policy: what relations should the Republic have with neutral states that were considered to be despotic; should the Republic support the propagation of revolutionary ideology in such states; and what role should political clubs play with regard to foreign relations?

The controversy occurred in early October 1793, during three sessions of the Paris Jacobin Club. At the beginning of the session of 5 October, a letter of the Istanbul club, requesting affiliation, was presented to the assembly. An unnamed citizen gave a statement of support, arguing that the French government needed allies and that the Turks were natural allies who had become alienated only because of the incompetence and perfidy of French diplomats. He considered the affiliation with the political club in Istanbul the safest means to bring about a Franco-Ottoman alliance, because the Club of Constantinople could function as intermediary between the Paris Jacobins and the Ottoman government. As a result of this speech, the Jacobin Club granted the requested affiliation without further discussion, passing on to the next item on the agenda.⁸⁰

Not until four days and two sessions later was the subject taken up again. On 9 October, Citizen Taschereau rose to speak. He was a textile manufacturer and allegedly 'some kind of bodyguard of Robespierre'.⁸¹ Taschereau demanded the repeal of the affiliation with the Club of Constantinople, on the grounds that such an affiliation was potentially dangerous for the 'patriots' of Istanbul, as it would expose them 'to the fury of the aristocrats'. He reminded the audience that a similar affiliation had been granted to the Manchester Society for Constitutional Information in 1792,⁸² which had strained the relations with Britain and resulted in the

⁷⁹ Marc Bouloiseau, 'Jacobins', in Samuel F. Scott and Barry Rothaus (eds.), *Historical Dictionary of the French Revolution*, 2 vols. (Westport, 1985), vol. 1, 489–92, 490.

⁸⁰ François-Alphonse Aulard (ed.), *La Société des Jacobins. Recueil de documents pour l'histoire du Club des Jacobins de Paris*, 6 vols. (Paris, 1889–97), vol. 5, 443.

⁸¹ Taschereau was an ardent Jacobin. He was imprisoned after 9 Thermidor. Later, he supported Gracchus Babeuf. See Alphonse de Beauchamp (ed.), *Biographie moderne . . .*, 3 vols., 2nd edn (Paris, 1816), vol. 3, 275. During 1793, he spoke quite often in the Jacobin Club until he was accused, at the end of the year, of being an agitator. As a consequence, he was excluded from the Jacobin Club, to be readmitted only in late April 1794. See Aulard (ed.), *La Société des Jacobins*, vol. 5, 540; Aulard (ed.), *La société des Jacobins*, vol. 6, 99.

⁸² Aulard (ed.), *La Société des Jacobins*, vol. 3, 499–502. One of the delegates of the Manchester Society to the Paris Jacobins was James Watt, who is much better known for his achievements in the development of the steam engine.

persecution of radical societies by the British government. '[You] know that the Society of Jacobins has a tremendous influence abroad; but this influence should not serve [as a pretext] to excite violent persecutions against patriots.'⁸³ Taschereau thus used two entangled propositions to justify his demand. One was that the affiliation could be considered as a threat to the political stability of the Ottoman Empire and could, therefore, lead to the persecution of sympathizers with the French Revolution. The other proposition held that the Jacobin Club was very influential outside France and could pose a real danger to the Ottoman system of government, especially through an affiliation with a revolutionary club in Istanbul. Therefore, if the Jacobins wanted an alliance with the Ottomans, they should refrain from becoming politically active in the Ottoman Empire. Taschereau's arguments convinced a majority of the Paris Jacobins and the affiliation with the Club of Constantinople was repealed.⁸⁴

Nevertheless, the debate did not end there. At the next session, on 11 October 1793, the painter Armand-Charles Caraffe, who had travelled to the Ottoman Empire in 1788 and 1789, rose to speak to the assembly for the very first time.⁸⁵ Caraffe declared he was surprised to see the affiliation with the Club of Constantinople repealed.⁸⁶ The Turks, he argued, were well disposed towards the French. They had even allowed the French to celebrate the death of Louis XVI.⁸⁷ He therefore insisted on granting an affiliation to the political club in Istanbul, because although the Ottomans did not serve the cause of liberty they would nevertheless be loyal allies.⁸⁸ Now, Taschereau had to react. He replied by arguing that the affiliation request was certainly a forgery aiming at provoking a war between France and the Ottoman Empire:

I can assure, I attest that the letter in question is a trap to get us a new enemy. It is known that the Jacobins have sworn to exterminate all despots; forming a Society in Constantinople or corresponding with the one that was allegedly established there would thus provoke a rupture with the Ottoman Porte. The Turks are well disposed in our favour; we must benefit from this and not deprive ourselves of this resource which may become important. [An affiliation] would furthermore expose the true Jacobins who may live there to great dangers; once recognized, they would inevitably become victims of their good intentions.⁸⁹

⁸³ Aulard (ed.), *La Société des Jacobins*, vol. 5, 451.

⁸⁴ Ibid.

⁸⁵ This was the only time Caraffe gave a statement in the Jacobin Club before 9 Thermidor. After the fall of Robespierre, he spoke more often. He was a dedicated Jacobin, which earned him imprisonment from late 1794 to 1797. See Andreas Beyer (ed.), *Allgemeines Künstlerlexikon* (Munich, Leipzig, 1997), vol. 16, 299.

⁸⁶ Aulard's edition of the minutes of the Paris Jacobin Club summarized some of the statements given during the session on 11 October 1793. My description is, therefore, based on the accounts of the *Moniteur universel* and the *Journal de la Montagne*.

⁸⁷ Caraffe probably referred to the revolutionary festivity, taking place on 20 January 1793, one day before the execution of Louis XVI, during which a tree of liberty was planted on the terrace of the French embassy. The news of the death of the French king did not arrive in Istanbul before March 1793 and no revolutionary celebrations were taking place around this time.

⁸⁸ 'Société des Amis de la liberté et de l'égalité, séante aux Jacobins de Paris. Séance du 20 du premier mois', *Moniteur universel*, No. 24, 15 October 1793.

⁸⁹ Ibid.

Taschereau clearly depicted the ideology of the political movement of which he was a part as incompatible with the Ottoman system of government. If the French Republic wanted to have friendly relations with the Ottoman Empire, it should not alienate the Sublime Porte by propagating ideas aiming at a change of the Ottoman regime.

Taschereau was seconded by two other speakers, both, like him, partisans of Robespierre. The first one who spoke was Citizen Moënné, assistant state's attorney of Paris.⁹⁰ He stated that even if the letter were authentic, it would not change the fact that an affiliation with a club in Istanbul was highly problematic. Good relations with the Ottoman Empire were too important to be jeopardized, especially since France (suffering from recurrent shortages of food) was importing great amounts of grain from the Levant. To Moënné, the only appropriate way of dealing with the Ottoman government was through diplomacy.⁹¹ The last speaker in this affair was François Chabot, a deputy of the National Convention.⁹² He argued that the Frenchmen living in the Ottoman Empire were no *sans-culottes*, but mostly merchants or government agents sent to the Levant by the Girondins and hence not trustworthy.⁹³ He therefore called for the confirmation of the repeal.⁹⁴ The assembly followed Chabot's suggestion and thus ended the debate on the Jacobin Club's role in Franco-Ottoman relations.

What does this short episode in the history of the Jacobin Club tell us about French foreign policy during the Terror? First, we see that French revolutionaries conceived it as a contradiction to fight despotism and to reach out, at the same time, for an alliance with what they considered the epitome of a despotic state. According to the definition of the eighteenth-century philosopher Montesquieu, who had a tremendous influence on French political thought, despotism is the government 'in which a single person, without law and without regulation, directs everything by his own will and caprice'.⁹⁵ In eighteenth-century French political rhetoric, however, the definition of despotism was broader. Moreover, the distinction between tyranny and despotism was not always clear.⁹⁶ French political

⁹⁰ De Beauchamp (ed.), *Biographie moderne*, vol. 2, 396. Moënné was executed in the aftermath of 9 Thermidor.

⁹¹ 'Société des Amis de la liberté et de l'égalité, séante aux Jacobins de Paris. Séance du 20 du premier mois', *Moniteur universel*, No. 24, 15 October 1793.

⁹² François Chabot, a former Capuchin friar, was a very active member of the Jacobin Club. He was considered a man of Robespierre, until accused, in late 1793, of corruption and conspiracy in a famous case revolving around the French East India Company. This affair cost him his life. He was executed in April 1794. See de Beauchamp (ed.), *Biographie moderne*, vol. 1, 250.

⁹³ 'Société des Amis de la liberté et de l'égalité, séante aux Jacobins de Paris. Séance du 20 du premier mois', *Moniteur universel*, No. 24, 15 October 1793.

⁹⁴ 'Société des Amis de la liberté et de l'égalité, séante aux Jacobins. Séance du 20e jour du 1er mois...', *Journal de la Montagne*, No. 133, 13 October 1793. The *Moniteur universel* reported misleadingly that Chabot called for a 'confirmation of the resolution'. The *Journal de la Montagne*, however, states clearly that Chabot was referring to a confirmation of the repeal and not to a confirmation of the affiliation.

⁹⁵ Charles Louis de Secondat de Montesquieu, *De l'esprit des lois*, 2 vols. (Paris, 1961), vol. 1, 12 (II, 2).

⁹⁶ Richard Koebner, 'Despot and Despotism: Vicissitudes of a Political Term', *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes*, 15 (1951), 275–302, 292–302; Hella Mandt, 'Tyrannis, Despotie', in Otto

discourse before and during the Revolution was imbued with the notion that France was threatened by despotism: at first, it was the monarchy that was in danger of lapsing into despotism. Even after the monarchy was disempowered, the spectre of ministerial (i.e. administrative) despotism prevailed, as well as the despotism that would be introduced by occupying forces in the event of a French military defeat. Throughout the revolutionary period, Frenchmen were continuously told that they were engaged in something like a 'war on despotism', in the struggle of a people that demanded freedom, a struggle against the tyranny of a few (kings, aristocrats, conspirators).⁹⁷

The Ottoman Empire, on the other hand, was perceived as *the* despotic model state. 'Reference works routinely alluded to Ottoman Turkey when defining "despotism" and its variants.'⁹⁸ Its political system—or, better, its alleged political system—served as a cautionary example for what might become of the French state if things went wrong. There can be no doubt that members of the Jacobin Club shared these views on the political system of the Ottoman Empire. A cursory analysis of the contexts in which the term 'Constantinople' was used during meetings of the Jacobin Club illustrates this: in roughly half of the instances I found in the minutes, the term was used as a reference to despotism.⁹⁹ Take, for example, a statement of Danton, on 14 December 1791, in which he denounced 'this faction that wants to give us the English constitution, with the subsequent hope to give us soon that of Constantinople'.¹⁰⁰ Or a declaration of Pierre-Fançois Réal, who, on 23 August 1794, objected to the proposed introduction of press censorship: 'and if [liberty of the press] does not exist to its full extent, I would prefer to be in Constantinople rather than in France with the revolutionary government'.¹⁰¹

Therefore, if the Ottoman Empire was a despotic state and if the Revolution was a life-and-death struggle against despotism, how could French revolutionaries want an alliance with the Ottomans? Robespierre's partisans in the Jacobin Club gave the answer to this question: French revolutionaries were primarily fighting for the freedom of their own country. Bringing freedom to other countries was of minor importance, and even impolitic, if this interfered with French interests. As this chapter has indicated, a majority of the members of the Jacobin Club in Paris shared this view. The affiliation request of the Istanbul club was rejected because it was feared that an affiliation might propagate the Revolution to the Ottoman Empire, notwithstanding the fact that the Club of Constantinople had no Ottoman

Brunner, Werner Conze, and Reinhart Koselleck (eds.), *Geschichtliche Grundbegriffe. Historisches Lexikon zur politisch-sozialen Sprache in Deutschland*, 8 vols. (Stuttgart, 1972–1997), vol. 6, 651–706, 674–5.

⁹⁷ John M. Burney, 'History, Despotism, Public Opinion and the Continuity of the Radical Attack on Monarchy in the French Revolution: 1787–1792', *History of European Ideas*, 17, 2–3 (1993), 245–63, 247; Kaiser, 'The Evil Empire?', 6. On the French discourse on despotism, see also Çirakman, 'From Tyranny to Despotism'; Venturi, 'Oriental Despotism'.

⁹⁸ Kaiser, 'The Evil Empire?', 14.

⁹⁹ I found about a dozen instances in Aulard's collection: Aulard (ed.), *La société des Jacobins*.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, vol. 3, 288. ¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*, vol. 6, 369.

members.¹⁰² 'World revolutionaries' such as Anarcharis Cloots, who evoked the idea of a universal republic and the liberation of humankind, were clearly in the minority.¹⁰³ Soon they were denounced and persecuted as enemies of the Revolution.¹⁰⁴

One can, therefore, conclude that even during the heyday of revolutionary vehemence, conventional views on foreign policy prevailed.¹⁰⁵ The Ottoman sultan had been a traditional ally of the French monarchy and most French republicans were willing to see in him a traditional ally of the French nation, no matter how he governed his empire. The refutation of the affiliation request was furthermore an affirmation of the privileged position of traditional diplomacy as the principal channel through which to conduct foreign negotiations. The Jacobins of Paris thereby rejected the suggestion to bypass French diplomatic agents by communicating with the Ottoman government through the Club of Constantinople. The controversy may, therefore, be seen as a confirmation of the doubts raised over the universal acceptance of a strict interpretation of the doctrine of cannon diplomacy. Roughly three weeks after the enactment of the 'provisional bases of diplomacy', the implementation of which would have meant the renunciation of official diplomacy (except with regard to Switzerland and the United States), the Jacobin Club passed a vote in favour of official diplomacy. What is more, during the whole debate, not a single speaker raised doubts on the expediency of alliance negotiations with the Ottoman Empire. One month later, in his speech to the National Convention, on 17 November 1793, Robespierre confirmed the views of his Jacobin partisans: 'Who would believe that we have established French clubs in Constantinople . . . ! Everyone senses that such a manoeuvre could be neither useful to our cause nor to our principles; but it was attempted to alarm or to irritate the Ottoman court . . .'¹⁰⁶

CONCLUSION

During the Terror, one of the main difficulties in the conduct of French foreign policy was, it seems, the fact that there was no consensus in the ruling Committee of Public Safety on the goals of such policy, nor on the means through which they were to be achieved. The Committee's preoccupation with the organization of the war effort apparently did not allow for a thorough discussion and resolution in this regard. This indecision led to a further paralysis of the foreign policy

¹⁰² Cf. Coller, 'The French Revolution and the Islamic World of the Middle East and North Africa', 127. For the membership list of the Club of Constantinople, see Chapter 7.

¹⁰³ Cf. Masson, *Le Département des affaires étrangères pendant la Révolution*, 299. For a concise presentation of Anarcharis Cloots' political thought, see Francis Cheneval, 'Der kosmopolitische Republikanismus. Erläutert am Beispiel Anacharsis Cloots', *Zeitschrift für philosophische Forschung*, 58 (2004), 373–93.

¹⁰⁴ 'Convention nationale. Rapport sur les principes du gouvernement révolutionnaire, [pronounced by Robespierre on 25 December 1793]', *Moniteur universel*, No. 97, 27 December 1793.

¹⁰⁵ See also Martin, 'La Diplomatie en Révolution', vol. 2, 263.

¹⁰⁶ Robespierre at the National Convention, 17 November 1793, *Archives parlementaires*, vol. 79, 380.

administration, which already had been greatly affected by the constant changes in structure, personnel, and modes of operation.

The minimal consensus with regard to foreign policy became subsumed under the term 'cannon diplomacy', which meant, primarily, no negotiations with the enemy. There existed, however, no unified position on the question of how to deal with neutral states. Bertrand Barère, the coordinator of the Committee of Public Safety's foreign policy, advocated a retreat from the diplomatic system in favour of a limitation to commercial instead of political relations. Robespierre, on the other hand, spoke out for a much more conventional conception of French foreign relations, a central aspect of which were the negotiations for a Franco-Ottoman alliance. In this matter, Robespierre had the majority of the Jacobin Club behind him, which is all the more fascinating, because the Paris Jacobins were at the same time ready to give up the chance to gain more influence in foreign policy.

What effect did the irresolution of the Committee of Public Safety have on the conduct of diplomacy on the ground? Above all, it meant that a diplomat such as Marie Descorches was largely left on his own. His government did not recall him, but it did not communicate with him either. As a result, he was largely responsible himself for implementing new elements of French revolutionary political culture into his diplomatic practice. All he could do in this regard was try to anticipate what his government expected of him.¹⁰⁷ He had little guidance, except for what he could read in the newspapers or in the letters of his correspondents. These adverse circumstances notwithstanding, the French envoy was very active, and tried to adjust his diplomatic practice to the forms of a new political culture, as the next chapter will show. Descorches's successors, Verninac and Aubert-Dubayet, were acting under much more favourable conditions. The governments they served did not continue to neglect the field of foreign relations. Moreover, the post-Thermidorian rulers of France cast no more doubts on the expediency of diplomacy. The conduct of foreign policy after the Terror in many ways witnessed a return of conventional diplomacy, wrapped in a republican garb.

¹⁰⁷ Virginie Martin has shown for the case of Italy that diplomats could also actively undermine the policies of the central government in Paris. See Virginie Martin, 'In Search of a "Glorious Peace"? Republican Diplomats at War, 1792–1799', in Pierre Serna, Antonino de Francesco, and Judith A. Miller (eds.), *Republics at War, 1776–1840: Revolutions, Conflicts and Geopolitics in Europe and the Atlantic World* (Basingstoke, 2013), 46–64.

5

Between Innovation and Continuity French Revolutionary Political Culture and Diplomatic Practice

One underlying theme of a great number of historical studies on the development of international relations during the French Revolution is the question of change and continuity. Did the French Revolutionary Wars mark the beginning of a new era of ideological warfare, and thus represent a clear break with traditional diplomacy, as has been argued by many diplomatic historians of the nineteenth century (e.g. Heinrich von Sybel)? Or should we rather stress the continuities between French republican and old regime diplomacy, like, for example, Albert Sorel?¹ Or is there something like a middle ground, in which the French Revolutionary Wars are interpreted as an 'extreme variation' within the early modern system of international relations, while emphasizing a clear rupture with regard to the French rejection of the traditional rules of the conduct of diplomacy (e.g. Jeremy Black)?²

This chapter deals with questions of rupture and continuity by focusing on just one detail of European international relations: diplomatic practice, or, more specifically, French revolutionary diplomatic practice in the Ottoman Empire. The early modern period saw the development of a European diplomatic culture. 'Diplomats from every country [adhering to this culture] came to behave in similar and even identical ways; to speak the same language—French—. . . ; [and] to be drawn from the same social group, the nobility and especially the higher echelons[.]'³ This culture was challenged when the French revolutionaries began to denounce it as incompatible with their political principles. But what were the consequences of the French regime change in the practice of diplomacy?

Historians who have written on French revolutionary diplomacy tend to emphasize, and in my eyes to overemphasize, the ruptures in revolutionary diplomatic practice.⁴ In a very prominent research article on the 'revolutionary attack on

¹ Cf. Belissa, 'Révolution française et ordre international', 35–7; Marc Belissa, 'De l'ordre d'Ancien Régime à l'ordre international. Approches de l'histoire des relations internationales', in Jean-Clément Martin (ed.), *La Révolution à l'œuvre. Perspectives actuelles dans l'histoire de la Révolution française* (Rennes, 2005), 217–27, 220–2; Belissa, 'War and Diplomacy (1792–1795)', 427.

² Black, *European International Relations*, 246; Black, *A History of Diplomacy*, 136.

³ Scott, 'Diplomatic Culture in Old Regime Europe', 60.

⁴ One exception is Christian Windler, who studied the diplomatic practice of French consuls in Tunis and whose study largely accords with my findings. See Windler, *La Diplomatie comme expérience de l'autre*, 379–83.

diplomatic practice', Linda and Marsha Frey argued that '[i]n their fervour [French revolutionaries] discarded all diplomatic conventions and rejected the system as a whole. To do otherwise would have compromised the Revolution itself.'⁵ However, as Chapter 4 made clear, the rejection of classical diplomacy 'as a whole' was supported by only some of the French revolutionaries, even during the Terror. Furthermore, as is evident from the negotiations in the Ottoman Empire, French diplomats were often far from 'discarding all diplomatic conventions'. It is, nevertheless, certainly true that the Revolution led to great alterations in French diplomatic culture. In the following, I will present two aspects of this transformation: changes with regard to the conduct of negotiations on the one hand, and the self-representation of the new French state on the other. These aspects are interwoven, and they both reveal the ambiguities in what was considered the correct way of practising republican diplomacy.

PRESENTS AND CORRUPTION

French envoys often oscillated between an ideological 'revolutionary' approach and a more conventional one, dictated by the French Republic's political interests. A good example of this wavering is Descorches's insecurity about whether his superiors expected him to bribe Ottoman officials or not. As the last chapter showed, the French envoy could not hope for much guidance from his foreign ministry. The corruptibility of the Ottoman government was notorious and many European diplomats considered bribery the only way to negotiate successfully at the Sublime Porte. It is highly questionable, though, how far bribery could have had any decisive effect on important resolutions of the Ottoman government. Louis XVI's venerable foreign minister, Vergennes, for example, was well aware from his own thirteen-year-long experience as ambassador in Istanbul that money had only limited influence on Ottoman politics.⁶

⁵ Frey and Frey, '“The Reign of the Charlatans Is Over”', 707. This article was highly influential; there is almost no recent major publication dealing with or mentioning French revolutionary diplomacy which does not refer to it or to other publications by the same authors, e.g. Belissa, 'War and Diplomacy (1792–1795)'; Belissa, *Repenser l'ordre européen (1795–1802)*; Black, *European International Relations*; Black, *A History of Diplomacy*; Blanning, *The French Revolutionary Wars*; Paulmann, *Pomp und Politik*; Scott, 'Diplomatic Culture in Old Regime Europe'; Stone, *Reinterpreting the French Revolution*; Windler, *La Diplomatie comme expérience de l'autre*. Other publications by the aforementioned authors covering the same field of interest include Linda Frey, 'Sugared Tricolors and Savage White Bears: French Diplomats Abroad', *Proceedings of the Western Society for French History*, 24 (1997), 311–24; Linda Frey and Marsha Frey, '“Courtesans of the King”: Diplomats and the French Revolution', *Proceedings of the Western Society for French History*, 32 (2004), 107–22; Linda Frey and Marsha Frey, 'Grégoire and the Breath of Reason: The French Revolutionaries and the Droit des Gens', *Proceedings of the Western Society for French History*, 38 (2010), 163–77; Linda Frey and Marsha Frey, *Proven Patriots: The French Diplomatic Corps, 1789–1799* (St Andrews, 2011). The last title was published as an e-book and can be accessed online (<http://hdl.handle.net/10023/1881>); there are some inaccuracies and errors in this publication.

⁶ Orville, *The Diplomatic Retreat of France and Public Opinion on the Eve of the French Revolution*, 47. On the Ottoman practice of gift-giving, see Vogel, 'Gut ankommen'.

Descorches, to avoid accusations that he was continuing the machinations of old regime diplomats, decided simply to inform his minister about the alleged corruptibility of the *reis-ül-küttab* Raşid Efendi, without suggesting any act of bribery.⁷ Obviously, the envoy provided this information to give his superior the option of ordering the bribing of the Ottoman minister. However, Descorches guarded himself against any reproaches by expressing his disapproval of every kind of corruption:

Nobody... is more convinced than I that [means of corruption] are only good for intriguers with whom we should no longer have anything in common. Will we continue to bring to foreigners our old political vices, our private immorality?...

[Our representatives] must be scrutinized even more carefully when they go abroad to provide role models of our republican manners. The weight of the consideration and esteem which will surround us, [and] which will place public opinion everywhere at our disposal, will, I think, be infinitely more powerful than the always questionable action and zeal of despicable hirelings.⁸

Although Descorches thus paid lip service to the ideals of French republican diplomacy, less than half a year later he declared it to be indispensable to 'grease the wheels of our carriage' with presents.⁹ The French envoy suggested that the Republic might give a present to the sultan in deference to the customs of the Ottoman Empire.¹⁰ He noted that a suitable gift would be a warship (with crew), to serve as a model for the improvement of the Ottoman navy.¹¹

From a French republican perspective, making an official present to the sultan certainly was much less problematic than bribing his subalterns. At the same time, Descorches made sure that his compatriots could not accuse him of being corruptible himself. When the sultan decided to send a present to the French envoy, showing his benevolence towards the French nation, Descorches explained to the Ottoman government that he was expected not to accept gifts from anybody.¹² This was a revolutionary innovation in diplomatic practice, as the exchange of gifts played a central role in early modern diplomacy.¹³

His own attitude towards receiving gifts notwithstanding, it was only a few weeks after suggesting the official present for the sultan that the French envoy tried to use presents to smooth the way of his negotiations. He attempted to send gifts to the *reis efendi*, the *kapudan paşa* (commander of the Ottoman navy), and the sultan's mother. It is very revealing that he began the account of this endeavour

⁷ 'L'homme n'est pas à bon marché...' See Descorches to Foreign Minister, 1 September 1793, MAE, CP Turquie 185, fol. 284.

⁸ Ibid., fols. 284–5.

⁹ Descorches to Foreign Minister, 10 February 1794, MAE, CP Turquie 187, fol. 61.

¹⁰ Ibid., fol. 61. ¹¹ Ibid., fol. 62.

¹² Descorches to Foreign Minister, 27 March 1794, MAE, CP Turquie 187, fol. 267.

¹³ A good starting point for this extensive topic is Peter Burschel and Christine Vogel (eds.), *Die Audienz. Ritualisierter Kulturkontakt in der Frühen Neuzeit* (Cologne, 2014). The great classic on gift exchange is Marcel Mauss, 'Essai sur le don. Forme et raison de l'échange dans les sociétés archaïques', *L'Année sociologique*, seconde série 1 (1923–4), 30–186.

with a statement reassuring the minister of foreign affairs that, in principle, he did still disapprove of corruption as a means of diplomacy:

I have expressed, citizen minister, in my dispatch of 1 September my personal principles with regard to the means of corruption; but [I am] at the same time aware of my duties . . . and [I] cannot bear on my conscience the intolerable weight of having neglected any means at my disposal that could lead to success, in order to achieve a goal which has become so precious for me, because important benefits for the Republic are attached to it; I have [therefore] considered neither the state of destitution of my funds, of which you know, nor my own reluctance.¹⁴

Thus, Descorches decided to first approach the *reis efendi* and to offer him a 'present' of 50,000 piastres. He furthermore insinuated that he could give another 100,000 to 150,000 piastres, if necessary.¹⁵ The great irony of this transaction lies in the fact that it was not the French republicans who styled themselves fierce enemies of any sort of corruption but the Ottomans, who turned Descorches's initiative into an outright failure. Neither the *reis efendi*, nor the *kapudan paşa*, nor the sultan's mother accepted his presents. The polite answer of the sultan's mother, who had been offered a 'flower of brilliants', is typical of the kind of excuse with which Descorches's gifts were rejected: 'it would be a sin to create an expense for this gentleman when it is for us to do everything for him'.¹⁶

It is hard to tell why Descorches's presents were not well received; exchanging gifts was an important part (not only) of Ottoman sociability.¹⁷ The refusal might have derived from the French envoy's original rejection of the sultan's present, which precluded the establishment of a relationship of mutual obligedness through gift exchange. The reaction of the sultan's mother might also be an allusion to the fact that Descorches still owed tens of thousands of piastres to the Ottoman government. Whatever the reasons for the French envoy's failure, what this episode makes clear is that even a diplomat avowing himself to the French revolutionary culture of diplomacy was in the end ready to use bribes, in exactly the same way as his *ancien régime* predecessors. Moreover, although he expressly informed his superiors about his actions, the envoy was never rebuked for trying to corrupt a foreign government. None of the internal government reports seeking to scrutinize whether Descorches was a reliable diplomat or a potential traitor mention his attempts at bribery, although both the practice and the comportment of government agents were under review.

After the Terror, when the French government prepared the mission of Descorches's successor Verninac, the matter of presents came up once again. This time there was hardly any question of whether or not presents were to be made to Ottoman dignitaries.¹⁸ Pierre Ruffin, who became Verninac's dragoman, was sent on a tour through the depots of Paris in which the expropriated luxuries of

¹⁴ Descorches to Foreign Minister, 27 March 1794, MAE, CP Turquie 187, fols. 267–8.

¹⁵ Descorches to Reis Efendi, 15 February 1794, MAE, CP Turquie 187, fol. 72.

¹⁶ Descorches to Foreign Minister, 27 March 1794, MAE, CP Turquie 187, fol. 269.

¹⁷ Vogel, 'Gut ankommen', 172–6.

¹⁸ 'Projet des présents à faire à Constantinople', MAE, CP Turquie 189, fol. 247.

emigrated and prosecuted 'aristocrats' had been stored, in order to find items which could be used as gifts.¹⁹ Ruffin, however, a man born in the Levant, who had lived in the Ottoman Empire for the greatest part of his life, considered most of the confiscated objects to be incompatible with Ottoman taste. Asked for his opinion about the use of diplomatic presents, he declared that they were crucial:

I do not hesitate to say that these gifts are indispensable and must be all the more considerable and well chosen, as on the one hand they will be exposed to the severest critique, and on the other hand the resulting judgement will have an extraordinary influence on the success of the [diplomatic] mission.²⁰

In the end, the Committee of Public Safety followed Ruffin's advice and commissioned new jewellery especially adapted to Ottoman taste, to the value of 432,700 livres, from the same jeweller who had previously created Louis XVI's presents to the sultan.²¹

During the rule of the French Directory, using corruption as a means of achieving a political goal in foreign relations was frowned upon no longer. The instructions for Verninac's successor Aubert-Dubayet not only required the French ambassador to give presents to Ottoman officials, but also gave explicit recommendations on bribery: 'One can . . . bribe more openly in Constantinople than elsewhere everything that appears to be venal.'²²

CEREMONIAL AND ETIQUETTE

The French revolutionary rejection of traditional forms of diplomatic ceremonial and etiquette was often seen as a great obstacle for the successful conduct of negotiations between the French and other European powers. Monarchical diplomats felt gravely offended by the appearance and comportment of their French interlocutors.²³ The French, it seems, used such provocations strategically, to affront and to humiliate

¹⁹ Report by Ruffin, 16 November 1794, MAE, CP Turquie 189, fol. 246.

²⁰ Ruffin, *Mémoire on the presents for the Ottoman Porte*, without date (1794), MAE, CP Turquie 189, fol. 195.

²¹ Submission to the Committee of Public Safety, by the jeweller Ménière, 17 December 1794, MAE, CP Turquie 189, fol. 397.

²² 'Supplément d'instructions à l'ambassadeur sur le cérémonial de son ambassade à Constantinople', 2 March 1796, MAE, CP Turquie 193, fol. 191.

²³ See e.g. Frey and Frey, "The Reign of the Charlatans Is Over", 727–8: 'The French at the Congress of Rastatt refused to bend to traditional etiquette; they wore coats and trousers instead of the traditional attire. They strode instead of pacing their steps. When Metternich hung a portrait of Francis I and even arranged the chairs so that a visitor when seated could not turn his back on the emperor, the French representative Debry in turn displayed a portrait of the conqueror of Italy [Bonaparte]. He opposed an idol with an idol. Treilhard, although both courteous and polished in his social relations, deliberately ignored the restraints so characteristic of the diplomacy of the old school. He stupefied the Austrians when he strode quickly into the room, when he pounded violently on the table, and when he shouted loudly at meetings. "I have never seen," one diplomat wrote, "such conduct among civilized men and even less among men of affairs."'

their counterparts.²⁴ After 9 Thermidor, when the time of cannon diplomacy was over and negotiations with the enemies of France had become possible again, the French position of strength made such a provocative approach possible. In principle, this was nothing new. The tactical use of insults is probably as old as diplomacy itself. Thus, when 'misbehaving' towards their interlocutors, French republican diplomats were not entirely innovative. However, their professed rejection of, or indifference to, the traditional rules of diplomacy allowed French diplomats to invent new ways of provoking their interlocutors. During the peace negotiations with Austria in 1797, for example, Napoleon Bonaparte simply rejected the Austrian negotiator's offer to recognize the Republic by declaring that the French Republic did not wish to be recognized. 'She is in Europe what the sun is on the horizon; too bad for those who do not want to see her and who do not want to benefit from her.'²⁵ However, the same attitude towards diplomatic traditions could also be used in a more conciliatory manner. When, during the same negotiations, the Austrian negotiator proposed that the French Republic and the emperor should use the same etiquette that had been established between the emperor and the French king, Bonaparte accepted this, on the grounds that matters of etiquette were inconsequential to the French anyway.

The Franco-Ottoman negotiations display a similar French attitude towards old regime ceremonial and diplomatic etiquette. However, the alleged indifference towards this aspect of diplomacy that was shown during negotiations with enemies played out differently here. The French diplomats in the Ottoman Empire were instructed to maintain friendly relations; they could make constructive use of their regime's neglect for questions of etiquette. During the old regime, disputes over ceremonial questions had more than once adversely affected the relations between Istanbul and Versailles, such as when French ambassadors were not seated in a way they considered appropriate during an audience, or when they were not allowed to wear their swords.²⁶ After 1792, French diplomats were expected to denounce such quarrels as ridiculous and absurd. The general instructions for diplomats, approved by the Committee of Public Safety in June 1793, declared, for example: 'It is neither by sumptuous show nor by pointless discussions about etiquette that [our diplomats] shall seek to maintain the dignity of the Republic; [this will be achieved] by wise and prudent conduct [and] by giving an example of the virtues which belong to the true republican.'²⁷

²⁴ Cf. Belissa, 'L'Entretien impossible?', 347–8. Virginie Martin presents a further explanation for the offensive comportment of French revolutionary diplomats. She suggests that such conduct could also be considered a revenge for the diplomatic humiliations they had to suffer in the aftermath of the inauguration of the Republic. See Martin, 'La Diplomatie en Révolution', vol. 2, 581.

²⁵ Napoléon I, *Œuvres de Napoléon Bonaparte*, 5 vols. (Paris, 1821), vol. 1, 350; Belissa, *Repenser l'ordre européen (1795–1802)*, 188.

²⁶ Dumont and Rousset Missy, *Supplément au corps universel diplomatique du droit des gens* . . . , vol. 5, 711–17.

²⁷ The general rules of conduct for republican diplomats were drawn up by foreign minister Lebrun on 1 June 1793. Curiously, this happened during the uprising that overthrew Lebrun's Girondin faction. He was put under house arrest, but remained in office for another three weeks, during which the Committee of Public Safety approved his regulations (on 7 June 1793). See François-Alphonse Aulard, 'Documents inédits. Instructions générales aux agents diplomatiques de la République française, 1 juin 1793', *La Révolution française*, 13 (1887), 66–73, 68.

Thus, when the *reis efendi* enquired how the Committee of Public Safety should be officially addressed, Descorches instructed his dragoman not to attach too much importance to such ceremonial questions: 'I think that from the height we have reached, we can only look down with pity on such vain minutiae which have value only for the charlatanism of the courts.'²⁸ Despite this seemingly laid-back attitude, Descorches could not accept the formal title suggested for the French government by the *reis efendi*: 'leaders or principals of the first of the nations believing [*croyant*] in Jesus'.²⁹ This formula, apart from identifying France with Christianity during the heyday of de-Christianization, was too similar to the style used for the French king, who had been referred to as '[the] most glorious of the majestic princes of the faith [*croyance*] of Jesus'.³⁰ Descorches informed the *reis efendi* that in future France should not be referred to as a 'nation believing in Jesus', since the Republic had granted religious freedom to all its citizens.³¹

The Ottoman government, it seems, saw no difficulties in introducing new forms of etiquette. The Sublime Porte was ready to accommodate French wishes regarding the style of address to a great degree, even to the point that the names of French institutions were not translated, but only transliterated and then explained. We can see this practice in the translation of a letter from the *reis efendi* to the Committee of Public Safety, composed in 1795. The italicized terms were kept in transliterated French in the Ottoman letter:

To the much honoured, much esteemed, much respected, and very worthy representatives of the French people, forming the *Committee of Public Safety*, which is a section of chosen deputies, especially responsible for an important part of the affairs of the Republic, and members of the *National Convention*, that is to say, the assembled elite of the nation.³²

Questions regarding style of address demonstrate very well that declaring the old etiquette ridiculous, and proclaiming a new simplicity in diplomatic interaction, did not mean that French revolutionaries were no longer concerned with such matters. Quite the contrary: French revolutionaries were constantly preoccupied with creating and adhering to new styles and etiquettes—republican ones.³³ One example of this is the introduction of the familiar address 'tu' instead of the formal 'vous'. In communications between Frenchmen this change of address, which

²⁸ Descorches to Foreign Minister, 27 March 1794, MAE, CP Turquie 187, fol. 272.

²⁹ Ibid., fol. 271: 'chefs ou principaux de la première des nations croyant en Jésus'.

³⁰ Testa (ed.), *Recueil des traités de la Porte ottomane*, vol. 2, 170: '[le] plus glorieux des princes majestueux de la croyance de Jésus'.

³¹ Diplomatic notes between Descorches and Reis Efendi, 17 March 1794, MAE, CP Turquie 187, fol. 210.

³² Translation of a letter from the *reis efendi* to the Committee of Public Safety, 1 November 1795, MAE, CP Turquie 192, fol. 117: 'Aux très honorés, très estimables, très considérés et très dignes représentants du peuple français, composant le *Comité de salut public*, qui est une section de députés choisis, spécialement chargés d'une partie importante des affaires de la République, et membres de la *Convention nationale*, c'est-à-dire, de l'élite de la nation assemblée.' Emphases in original. The Ottoman original was dated to 29 October 1795—three days after the Constitution of the Year III had come into effect, in which the Committee of Public Safety was replaced by the Directory. Thus, it was not long after this letter that the Sublime Porte was obliged to change the formula once again.

³³ Cf. Frey and Frey, 'The Reign of the Charlatans Is Over', 708.

symbolized equality among citizens, became quasi-obligatory by late October 1793.³⁴ In his official correspondence, Descorches used the 'vous' until the arrival of French Commissaire Thainville, who was sent from Paris to enquire into the French envoy's conduct. Thainville arrived just as Descorches was preparing a letter to his superior. The result is a curiosity: a dispatch that addresses the minister with 'vous', except for the postscript (composed two days later and announcing the arrival of Thainville), in which Descorches immediately switches to the informal 'tu'.³⁵

This new style, which began to fade out in 1795,³⁶ had the potential to disconcert when used between French and Ottoman officials. Descorches, therefore, never used the 'tu' in his diplomatic correspondence and also continued to address his Ottoman interlocutors with the usual titles of honour, although in France such titles had been abolished in 1790. The foreign ministry in Paris, on the other hand, failed for a long time to establish a clear policy on how to address foreign dignitaries. As late as in early 1794, we find a draft letter to the *kapudan paşa* that was composed in a traditional manner and then corrected, to be more 'republican' in style: throughout this letter, the 'vous' was crossed out and replaced by an informal 'tu' (see Figure 5.1). 'Ottoman Porte' replaced the expression 'Sublime Porte' for the Ottoman government. Probably, the qualification 'sublime' sounded too unequal. These details were easy to change. More difficult were the salutations, both at the beginning and at the end of the letter. The original draft of the letter begins with the traditional address 'monsieur', which in French correspondence was now usually replaced with the new address 'citoyen'. However, the title 'citizen' was clearly inappropriate when addressing an Ottoman official. Therefore, the simple one-word salutation had to be replaced by a more tortuous formula: 'Le Ministre des affaires étrangères au Capitan-Pacha de la Porte ottomane'.³⁷

This letter was probably never sent to its addressee, because it was composed during the time when the Committee of Public Safety delayed all diplomatic activities (see Chapter 4).³⁸ Nevertheless, it shows what potential problems could arise for French diplomats from the new republican etiquette. The omission of honorific titles and the use of informal modes of address might easily give offence. In Istanbul, however, there seems to have been a pragmatic solution to this problem: translation. The French legation's dragomans in the Ottoman capital usually translated official letters that were sent to the Ottoman government, so the French envoy was probably able to make sure that the traditional formulas of respect reappeared in the translations. I found no reference to Ottoman complaints regarding the appropriateness of the forms of address used in French communication with the Sublime Porte during the tenure of Marie Descorches.

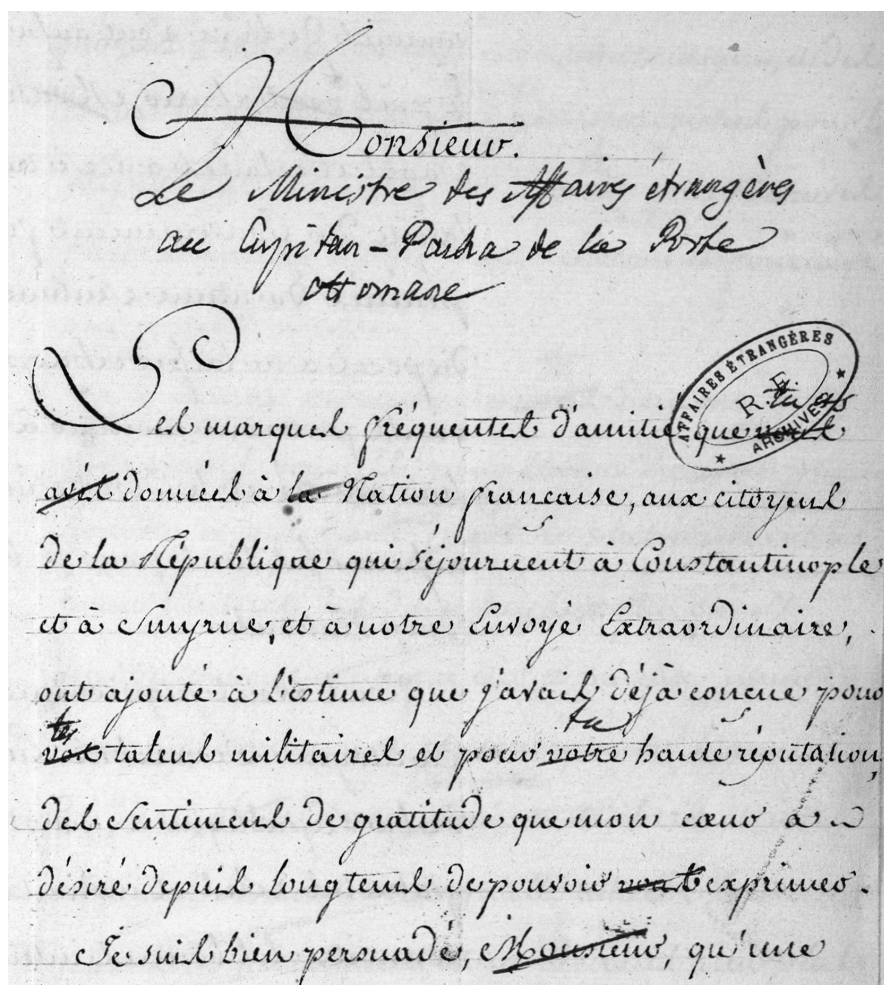
³⁴ Archives parlementaires. De 1787 à 1860, Série 1 (Paris, 1911), vol. 78, 85. On forms of address in old regime France, see Giora Sternberg, 'Epistolary Ceremonial: Corresponding Status at the Time of Louis XIV', *Past and Present*, 204 (2009), 33–88.

³⁵ Descorches to Foreign Minister, 27/29 March 1794, MAE, CP Turquie 187, fol. 277.

³⁶ Degros, 'La Révolution', 346.

³⁷ 'Le Ministre des affaires étrangères au Capitan-Pacha de la Porte ottomane', early 1794, MAE, CP Turquie 186, fols. 549–50.

³⁸ A letter to the *reis efendi*, composed in the same style and around the same time suffered a similar fate: MAE, CP Turquie 186, fol. 543.



Monsieur.
 Le Ministre des Affaires étrangères
 au Capitan-Pacha de la Porte
 ottomane

Les marques fréquentes d'amitié que vous
 avez données à la Nation française, aux citoyens
 de la République qui séjournent à Constantinople
 et à Smyrne, et à notre Envoyé Extraordinaire,
 ont ajouté à l'estime que j'avais déjà conçue pour
 vos talents militaires et pour votre haute réputation,
 des sentiments de gratitude que mon cœur a
 désiré depuis longtemps de pouvoir vous exprimer.
 Je suis bien persuadé, Monsieur, qu'une

Circular stamp: AFFAIRES ÉTRANGÈRES, R. L. 186, 186, 186

Figure 5.1 First page of the letter to the *kapudan paşa*. MAE, CP Turquie 186, fol. 549.

His successor, Verninac, however, witnessed one incident in which the formal shortcomings of French government communication were uncovered, because the dragoman of the Ottoman government decided to examine the French original. Unfortunately for Verninac, this was no mere exchange of second-rate diplomatic notes, but occurred during his very accreditation process as French envoy to the Sublime Porte: the letters in question were his official credentials. Descorches's credential letter was written under the Girondin Foreign Minister Lebrun, at the end of 1792, a time when the Republic still had a very provisional character. This letter was still in keeping with most of the old formulas of the French kingdom, the main difference being that the institution of the monarch was replaced by the

executive council (the cabinet).³⁹ Consequently, instead of Louis XVI's signature, the document bore the autographs of all ministers and members of the executive council.⁴⁰

When Verninac received his credentials, two years later, the Republic had drastically changed. It had just prevailed in the fiercest struggle for survival, it had gone through the Terror, and was now ruled by a Committee of Public Safety purged of Robespierre and his supporters. The French government after 9 Thermidor was adhering to republican symbols and etiquette no less than the government of the Terror. Verninac's credentials were thus composed in a manner that French republicans could have described as 'less monarchical, simpler, shorter, and worthy of the style of the Republic'.⁴¹ Simple and short is certainly a correct description of the letter of credence, issued for the Ottoman sultan. It is composed mainly of three long sentences and it addresses Selim III, the 'Emperor of the Muslims, friend and ally of the French', with the informal 'tu':

The representatives of the French people, constituting the Committee of Public Safety of the National Convention, charged with the direction of foreign relations by the decree of 17 Fructidor of the 2nd Year of the Republic.

To Selim 3rd, Emperor of the Muslims. Friend and ally of the French.

We have appointed the citizen Raymond Verninac, former minister plenipotentiary of the French Republic at the Swedish government, to reside in your [*ta*] imperial city in the capacity of envoy extraordinary. The patriotism and the talents of which he has given proof in the different public offices he has held, convinced us that he will fulfil to our satisfaction and to yours [*la tienne*] the duties of this new mission, our instructions, and the evident interest in good harmony between both nations. We invite you [*Nous t'invitons*] to have faith in everything he tells you [*qu'il te dira*] on our behalf and in the name of the French Republic, and to trust that above all he has orders to maintain the friendship which exists and must always exist between our two governments [the word 'governments' was a replacement for the word 'peoples' in the original version of this draft].⁴²

³⁹ The most obvious alteration between this credential letter and one of the *ancien régime* is of course that it is not issued 'in the name of the king', but 'in the name of the French Republic'. However, there are also a number of more subtle differences. The counts Choiseul-Gouffier and St Priest, for example, are not referred to as counts, but as 'sieur Choiseul Gouffier' and 'sieur St Priest'—a designation originally used for commoners. In this context, however, the 'sieur' obviously meant to indicate that these men were not accepting the new order: they were not noblemen any more (as the nobility was abolished), but they had also not become citizens. Citizen Descorches, on the other hand, who was also an ex-nobleman, was referred to with his military rank (a permitted designation of honour) 'Marie Descorches, maréchal de camp des armées de la République'.

⁴⁰ Copy of Descorches's letter of credence, 27 December 1792, CADN, Constantinople, Ambassade, Série B3, unfoliated.

⁴¹ These were the words used when the Committee of Public Safety ordered Buchot to draft a new template for the letters of appointment of consuls. The letter of appointment for the new consul in Izmir had to be changed, because it was drafted after a template which the executive council had used in the first year of the Republic—and which was, like Descorches's credentials, based on the formulas used during the *ancien régime*. See Commissaire of External Relations to Committee of Public Safety, 25 August 1794, MAE, CP Turquie 188, fol. 497.

⁴² Committee of Public Safety to Selim III, 2 November 1794, MAE, CP Turquie 189, fol. 176.

A similar letter, also using 'tu', was addressed to the grand vizier⁴³ and a more extensive letter to the *reis efendi*.⁴⁴ However, this new style of letter did not suit the taste of the Ottoman government. The problem arose when, at the end of the negotiations for the recognition of the Republic, the dragoman of the Sublime Porte demanded to see the French original of Verninac's credentials. The fact that the letters of credence did not use the customary courtesies seems to have produced a minor scandal at the Ottoman government. Verninac was confronted with a demand that he request new credentials that would fulfil all formal requirements; and with the threat that the recognition of the Republic would be postponed until the arrival of such credentials. In the end, the French envoy was able to calm down the situation by succumbing to the Ottoman demands and by asking the *reis efendi* to authorize the dragoman of the Ottoman government to make a translation that would adhere to the usual style, promising that he would instantly request new credentials that were compliant with the formal requirements of the Sublime Porte.⁴⁵

Verninac, it seems, had no difficulties convincing his government that it was both necessary and appropriate to comply with the Ottoman demands and to have his credentials formulated in a manner that would be acceptable to the Sublime Porte. French revolutionaries could compromise, when compromise made sense strategically. Verninac was able to argue that the Ottoman government had shown its goodwill, by provisionally accepting his 'unconventional' credentials and by agreeing to address him as 'citoyen'. Furthermore, when reporting the incident of his credentials to the Committee of Public Safety, the envoy was able to refer to several precedents, in which the government had deviated from French revolutionary principles of etiquette to meet the expectations of foreign governments:

The decree of the National Convention, deciding to address ambassadors and envoys of foreign powers with the titles they have chosen themselves; the example of the [Convention's] president, who did not use the *tu* when addressing [in a public ceremony] the ambassador of Sweden; and [the example] of the peace treaty with Prussia, in which the French plenipotentiary addressed the King of Prussia with the title of majesty; [all these examples] bear witness that the Committee of Public Safety will approve of the expedient which I have employed to avoid a postponement which could have become very detrimental to our affairs. [I am furthermore convinced that the Committee] will substitute the letters of credence which I induced [the Ottoman government] to accept [temporarily], with letters such as the Porte desires. Let me point out, moreover, that this complaisance towards the Sublime Porte is reciprocal, since [the Ottoman government] addressed me, upon my explicit request, with the title of citizen.⁴⁶

⁴³ Committee of Public Safety to the Ottoman Grand Vizier, 2 November 1794, MAE, CP Turquie 189, fol. 177.

⁴⁴ Committee of Public Safety to Reis Efendi, 2 November 1794, MAE, CP Turquie 189, fols. 178–9.

⁴⁵ Report of Verninac to the Committee of Public Safety, 14 July 1795, MAE, CP Turquie 191, fols. 231–2.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

This example shows clearly that French revolutionary diplomats were sensible to questions of etiquette and courtesy—even towards a monarchical government which many Europeans believed to be a despotic regime. They were ready to compromise to show their goodwill; as were the Ottomans, who turned a blind eye to the formal lapse in Verninac's credentials and solved the problem by translating the letters 'correctly'.

The credential letters of Verninac's successor Aubert-Dubayet, like the instructions he received from his government, witnessed the return of a much more scrupulous preoccupation with ceremonial traditions.⁴⁷ Aubert-Dubayet, the first French republican representative in Istanbul holding the title of ambassador, was in possession of credentials addressing the Ottoman sultan with the old regime formula: 'Most high, most mighty, most excellent, most magnanimous, and most invincible prince, great Emperor of the Muslims, Sultan Selim III, in whom all honour and virtue abound. Our very dear and perfect friend, may God augment your grandeur and highness with a very happy end.'⁴⁸ Ambassador Aubert-Dubayet was one of a number of army generals who served on diplomatic missions under the Directory. The new diplomats were much better instructed on ceremonial matters than their predecessors were in 1792–5. This fact notwithstanding, many diplomatic historians have depicted these generals' behaviour at foreign courts as that of the metaphorical bulls in china shops (a topic that probably deserves a critical revision).⁴⁹

The instructions for the missions of Sémonville, Descorches, and Verninac, unlike those given to *ancien régime* ambassadors, did not mention any questions of protocol. Aubert-Dubayet, however, received highly detailed instructions on how to position himself with regard to ceremonial matters and questions of representation. The preoccupation with ceremonial issues in the instructions for Aubert-Dubayet was part of a more general trend in French foreign policy after 9 Thermidor. In April 1795, the deputy Merlin de Douai announced at the National Convention that the Republic needed a diplomatic protocol:

Up to now, . . . there has been no question of etiquette; . . . fraternity alone sufficed and we improvised our protocol . . . But the distinctions [of protocol] express the degree of affection and respect that nations show for each other; and it seems impossible not to retain [such distinctions], at least until . . . other [general] rules have been established.⁵⁰

During the same month, the Convention passed a law concerning the regulation of diplomatic audiences. In order to avoid any quarrels over etiquette, French diplomatic representatives were instructed to demand the same ceremonial honours for the Republic that had been granted to the monarchy before the Revolution.⁵¹ In the context of old regime European diplomatic culture, this seemingly conservative stance was an innovation, as traditionally republics had a difficult standing in

⁴⁷ On this return of an elaborate ceremonial under the Directory, see Raymond Guyot, *Le Directoire et la paix de l'Europe. Des traités de Bâle à la deuxième coalition* (Paris, 1911), 89–92.

⁴⁸ Credential letter for Aubert-Dubayet, February/March 1796, MAE, CP Turquie 193, fol. 261.

⁴⁹ Cf. Belissa, *Repenser l'ordre européen (1795–1802)*, 188.

⁵⁰ Quoted *Ibid.*, 185.

⁵¹ Belissa, 'L'Entretien impossible?', 336.

diplomatic ceremonial.⁵² Nevertheless, as this demand was consistent with the Ottoman policy of considering all treaties with France valid, no matter which government had concluded them, the French experienced no difficulties with this issue, and when the British consul in Izmir attempted, in the summer of 1796, to obtain precedence over his French colleague, all he achieved was a polite rejection.⁵³

Ambassador Aubert-Dubayet received explicit orders to negotiate for his embassy the same ceremonial honours that had been granted to the ambassadors of the French kings.⁵⁴ Consequently, the French ambassador also had to observe substantial parts of the traditional ceremonial, which not even two years earlier had been denounced as ridiculous. Once again, just as during the *ancien régime*, ambassadors were instructed when and how to take a bow, in order to measure out the right amount of honour for the respective parties: 'The Ambassador of France shall put the French Republic on the same footing as the sultan, by putting the right hand on his chest and by making a head bow every time he pronounces the words "his highness" or "French Republic" in his introductory address.'⁵⁵

Once again, just as during the *ancien régime*, the French ambassador studied the protocols that had been observed during previous embassies—and the disputes related to them. Aubert-Dubayet was instructed that he had a right to all honours that had ever been granted to any French ambassador.⁵⁶ All details of the ceremonial during audiences with the sultan were recapitulated, from the question of how the French ambassador should be seated, to matters of precedence,⁵⁷ to the questions of how many caftans had to be distributed to the retinue of the ambassador and whether the ambassador was allowed to wear a caftan himself during the audience with the grand vizier and with the sultan (he was not).⁵⁸ Furthermore, Aubert-Dubayet was expected not to compromise on any of these matters, especially if this meant that monarchies were treated with more respect than republics.⁵⁹

Only in one regard did the Directory defuse a source of conflict between French ambassadors and the Sublime Porte. During the *ancien régime*, there had been long disputes about whether the ambassador was allowed to wear a sword when in audience with the sultan. The republican government now solved this problem by arguing that the ambassador was representing the nation as a political body. Therefore, all symbols of the personal status of the ambassador should be subordinated to his political role. Thus the sword, as a symbol of his status as an army officer (for his predecessors it was a symbol of their nobility), could not be worn when the ambassador was representing the nation in the presence of a foreign sovereign.⁶⁰

⁵² Thomas Maissen, *Die Geburt der Republic. Staatsverständnis und Repräsentation in der frühneuzeitlichen Eidgenossenschaft* (Göttingen, 2008), 104.

⁵³ Smith to Grenville, 10 August 1796, TNA, FO 78/17, fol. 139.

⁵⁴ 'Supplément d'instructions à l'ambassadeur sur le cérémonial de son ambassade à Constantinople', 2 March 1796, MAE, CP Turquie 193, fol. 197.

⁵⁵ Ibid., fol. 190.

⁵⁶ Ibid., fol. 192.

⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁸ Ibid., fol. 196.

⁵⁹ Ibid., fol. 194.

⁶⁰ Ibid., fols. 196–7.

REPRESENTATION

In matters of representation in foreign countries, the French Republic had tried to break with the *ancien régime* from early on. In late 1792, French consuls in the Levant were ordered to exchange the royal emblem on their doors for the republican coat of arms. However, it was not only the decoration of houses or the buttons on French uniforms that had to be changed;⁶¹ the whole culture of diplomatic representation was challenged. How should the Republic present itself in the Ottoman Empire? Shortly after his arrival in Istanbul, Descorches tried to answer this question by forwarding to the foreign ministry a 'Project for a guard of honour for the embassy of the Republic in Constantinople', authored by Citizen Paris, a French merchant of Istanbul.⁶² This guard should ensure a respectable self-presentation for the Republic, without having recourse to the pomp of the old regime:

Our new laws prohibit the kind of pompous appearance, which European ministers employ for their representation at the Ottoman Porte. [However,] in order not to deprive ourselves of the consideration which the Turks willingly accord to an imposing exterior, our ambassadors should replace the luxury of servitude by republican luxury.⁶³

Descorches strongly supported this point of view. He was of the opinion that a certain degree of magnificence in representation would be beneficial to his mission, since, when negotiating with the Sublime Porte, as he put it, one also had to 'speak to the eye' of the Ottomans:⁶⁴

In Turkey, perhaps more than elsewhere, those who speak to the eye will influence their considerations. This is why it was always thought that this mission should be fulfilled by an ambassador and that he had to be surrounded by great magnificence. There can be no doubt, however, that the time is over for liveries, gold decorations—the pomp of despotism and its accomplices, who thought to prove their strength by multiplying the slaves around them. Today, our representation should, I think, be of a simple and masculine character, symbolizing the austere morals that are the strength and merit of good republicans.⁶⁵

Although Descorches presented the republican guard of honour as a tool of representation without the pomp of the old regime, his superior was sceptical. He seemingly had the impression that such an institution would serve the vanity of the French envoy rather than the representation of republican virtues. Furthermore, the foreign minister hinted at the fact that France was displaying its vast resources in the present war and therefore did not need to demonstrate them through an honorary guard. He also

⁶¹ Monge to French Consuls in the Levant, 1792, MAE, CP Turquie 184, fol. 122.

⁶² Citizen Paris will be encountered again in Chapter 9, as the author of republican hymns.

⁶³ Citizen Paris, 'Projet d'une garde d'honneur pour l'ambassade de la République à Constantinople', MAE, CP Turquie 185, fol. 167.

⁶⁴ About one month later, Descorches suggested a similar measure to enhance the representation of his legation. This time he proposed having a frigate sent to Istanbul. See Descorches to Foreign Minister, 1 September 1793, MAE, CP Turquie 185, fols. 283–4.

⁶⁵ Descorches to Foreign Minister, 8 August 1793, MAE, CP Turquie 185, fol. 163.

seemed to suggest that such a project was hardly more than an expensive plaything, and that the Republic's money would be better spent on the battlefield:

I have to point out to you . . . that it is against our principles to impose ourselves on foreign nations with a sumptuous exterior [the last two words were a replacement for the words 'ridiculous pomp' (*faute ridicule*) in the original draft]. It is through wisdom, moderation, and other civic virtues that the representatives of the French people should ensure that their missions are respected in foreign countries. The present war is showing the immense resources of France quite well enough; it is not necessary to display them in the vain pageantry of an ambassador.⁶⁶

However, what is highly interesting about the foreign minister's response to the proposal is that, these strong objections notwithstanding, the foreign minister promised to support his envoy in the executive council, should Descorches judge that a more illustrious representation of the legation was indispensable for the success of his negotiations. A deviation from the principles of revolutionary diplomacy was thus considered acceptable, if it served a key political objective.⁶⁷

The popularity of the notion that the representation of the Republic ought to be frugal, simple, and unpretentious did not last for very long. On 8 June 1795, for example, Verninac celebrated his official admission at the Sublime Porte with a triumphal procession through the city—just as the royal ambassadors had done.⁶⁸ However, the symbolic message which this event was meant to convey was very different. The declared goal was to display the members of a free nation to the inhabitants of the Ottoman capital, but not to give rise to the notion that liberty meant disorderliness. All (male) French citizens were invited to join the procession to the Sublime Porte; but a detailed catalogue of regulations for the march had to be devised in advance, in a democratic process:

The envoy . . . thought it advantageous to regularize the march, to avoid confusion and to give the Turkish and other inhabitants of this capital an idea of the decency and order that animate and embellish the movements of a meeting of free men. At the same time, he considered it a necessary consequence of the sacred principles on which our republican government is founded to hand over, to the citizens assembled for this purpose, the task of discussing and adopting the organization which appeared to them to be the most suitable.⁶⁹

The plan that was eventually adopted determined that the citizens would wear national uniforms and would group themselves in an infantry and a cavalry unit, with two French officers being their commanders. Presenting themselves in uniform was meant to symbolize the equality of citizens, among whom the only form of acceptable social distinction was a functional one, illustrated by the prominent position of the army officers. What makes this episode interesting is that the

⁶⁶ Foreign Minister to Descorches, 25 October 1793, MAE, CP Turquie 186, fol. 227.

⁶⁷ Ibid., fol. 227.

⁶⁸ For a description of this procession, see Feuillatré, 'Un cortège républicain à Constantinople le 20 Prairial an III (8 juin 1795)'.

⁶⁹ Report on the preparations for Verninac's audience of admission, MAE, CP Turquie 191, fol. 87.

procession of uniformed citizens largely resembles Descorches's project of an honorary guard. Aubert-Dubayet ultimately completed this development by bringing a guard of honour with him, in the form of a company of light artillery that was meant to serve as a model unit for the Ottoman army. Thus throughout the revolutionary period, a military appearance was deemed an appropriate style of representation for the French Republic in the Ottoman Empire.

In terms of the claim to simplicity and virtuous frugality in the representation of the French state, Aubert-Dubayet's mission was arguably closer to the monarchy than to Descorches's mission.⁷⁰ In his instructions, we find no more admonitions urging a moderate appearance. On the contrary, the French Directory was obviously of the opinion that, in order to impress the Ottomans and others, the ambassador of the French Republic should exceed the pomp of the old regime:

The embassy of the French Republic at the Porte, [representing] a great people that has recovered its freedom in the midst of enslaved nations, should have a character of grandeur that is consistent with its dignity. The French people, victorious over the conspiracy of almost the entirety of Europe, must lose no touch of its majesty, but should present itself with even greater lustre in the pomp of its solemn embassies.⁷¹

CONCLUSION

Considering the instructions given to Ambassador Aubert-Dubayet, one is tempted to conclude this analysis of French revolutionary diplomatic practice with Linda and Marsha Frey's assessment that in the end 'the importance of style and the recurrence of certain common territorial and strategic concerns tended to diminish the differences between the old and the new [diplomacy]'.⁷² Clearly, under the rule of the Directory the French witnessed a return to a much more conventional conduct of diplomacy.⁷³ Nevertheless, French statesmen continued to declare that France had broken with the diplomacy of the old regime.⁷⁴ Even under the rule of Bonaparte, 'the "return" to the diplomatic *ancien régime* was only partial'.⁷⁵ What seems to be true for the entire revolutionary period is that, to a certain degree and within the rules of the political discourse of their time, French politicians and diplomats could choose which elements of diplomacy they labelled as belonging to the old regime and which they deemed natural or indispensable. Marc Belissa speaks in this context of a French republican 'invention or reinterpretation of a diplomatic tradition of the *ancien régime*'.⁷⁶ This was also true for a French diplomat such as Marie Descorches, far away from Paris and only rarely instructed

⁷⁰ Also the public audiences of the Directory in Paris reminded contemporaries of the *ancien régime*'s splendour. See Christina Schröder, *Republik im Experiment. Symbolische Politik im revolutionären Frankreich (1792–1799)* (Cologne, 2014), 154–6.

⁷¹ 'Supplément d'instructions à l'ambassadeur sur le cérémonial de son ambassade à Constantinople', 2 March 1796, MAE, CP Turquie 193, fol. 188.

⁷² Frey and Frey, '"The Reign of the Charlatans Is Over"', 743.

⁷³ Ibid., 735–6; Paulmann, *Pomp und Politik*, 70.

⁷⁴ Belissa, 'L'Entretien impossible?', 348.

⁷⁵ Ibid., 334.

⁷⁶ Ibid., 334.

on the views of his government. His and his successors' conduct of negotiations with the Ottoman government can be described neither as a rupture with, nor as a continuation of, traditional diplomacy. It was not a rupture, because the French accepted the established conventions in Franco-Ottoman diplomacy as a basis to which they could fall back in case of a dispute over an innovation.⁷⁷ What helped in this regard was that the French were negotiating with a government that had never adhered to the traditions of *ancien régime* diplomacy, in a strict sense. Therefore, the new relative flexibility with regard to questions of protocol could play out as an advantage. All through the years between 1792 and 1795, the French never pushed innovations in diplomatic practice so far as to alienate the Ottoman side.

After 1795, French diplomacy may have become more conventional. However, even during this period, the language, the symbols, and the rituals manifested the political culture of the new regime and not that of the old one. Virginie Martin has rightly pointed out that 'what looked like the return of France on the diplomatic scene, was in fact the Republic's first appearance on this scene'.⁷⁸ In diplomatic encounters between diplomats from France and the Coalition states, confrontations and provocative behaviour were not unusual, and it can be assumed that they were, to a certain degree, in the interest of the adversary groups. In the Franco-Ottoman negotiations, however, both parties were eager to avoid tensions in questions of etiquette. Potential problems were often solved in a pragmatic manner and both sides were ready to compromise. Because of the strategically similar position, French diplomats took a comparable stance with regard to two other neutral monarchies and potential French allies, Denmark and Sweden.⁷⁹ The manifold examples of pragmatism notwithstanding, the assertion that French revolutionary diplomats 'were as ideologically driven as their counterparts on the various revolutionary committees'⁸⁰ is not wrong. However, as has been seen in Chapter 4, the men of the revolutionary committees, and even the members of the Jacobin Club, were able to speak and act in favour of rather conventional approaches to foreign policy, if doing so served the interests of the French Republic.

The reasons why France was not able to forge an alliance with the Ottoman Empire, to create a league of neutral states, and to support the insurrection in Poland can be partly traced back to the inability of the central government to make a foreign policy worthy of the name.⁸¹ Partly it was also due to the differing interests of the concerned states. The emergence of a new political culture in France that massively influenced the practice of diplomacy had, however, only a marginal effect—if any effect at all—on the failure of negotiations, at least in the Ottoman case.

⁷⁷ Marc Belissa asserts that generally in negotiations with states that were too far away from France to be threatened by force, diplomatic meetings took the most conventional forms. *Ibid.*

⁷⁸ Martin, 'La Diplomatie en Révolution', vol. 2, 219.

⁷⁹ On the negotiations with Denmark, see Rémusat, 'Un sans-culotte à la cour de Danemark'; on those with Sweden, see Feuillat, 'Un projet d'alliance monarchique sous la Terreur'.

⁸⁰ Frey and Frey, 'The Reign of the Charlatans Is Over', 708.

⁸¹ Sorel, *L'Europe et la Révolution française*, vol. 4, 67.

6

Self-Containment or World Revolution? The Purpose of French Revolutionary Propaganda

Did French diplomats try to propagate the new political culture of the French Revolution in the countries to which they were sent? A number of historians have argued that they did. To quote, for example, Linda and Marsha Frey: 'Like all crusaders, they were not content to stay at home. These French representatives and many others proselytized for the revolutionary creed; they carried what Pitt deemed "opinions in arms".'¹ According to Frey and Frey, producing and disseminating propaganda aimed at a regime change was an essential part of French revolutionary diplomats' activities: 'French envoys distributed seditious propaganda, meddled in local affairs, or engaged in what one disgruntled diplomatic official termed "contemptuous intrigues".'² The ultimate political goal of these diplomats was the revolutionizing of any society to which they were sent.³ 'Their very presence and their articulation of an alternative world view challenged the old order; and they were not content simply to let the old order collapse on its own, as it inevitably would in their view. Instead, they expedited its collapse by fomenting sedition.'⁴

The assessment that French revolutionaries were similar to crusaders—who, inspired by their faith, and sword in hand, would try to force everybody they met to convert to their (de-Christianized) creed—is not new. In the historiography of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, according to Marc Belissa, 'the hate figure of the "revolutionary diplomat" is identified with that of the "Jacobin emissary" unable to differentiate diplomacy and propaganda'.⁵ This view was advocated by Albert Sorel's opponent Heinrich von Sybel, as early as the middle of the nineteenth century:

But on this point the Mountain and the Gironde were fully agreed; for they all had the same ardent impulse towards universal freedom and universal conquest . . . [T]here was no difference of opinion among the parties on this head. Danton and his associates, the Girondists Brissot and Clavière, and Dumouriez's friend Lebrun, all had the same ideas respecting the revolutionary metamorphosis of Europe as the demagogues of the Hotel de Ville, and the fanatics of the Jacobin club. The annihilation of all kings, the

¹ Frey and Frey, "The Reign of the Charlatans Is Over", 708.

² Ibid., 719. See also Frey and Frey, "Courtesans of the King", 108.

³ Frey and Frey speak of an 'admitted insurrectionary intent of French envoys'. See Frey and Frey, *Proven Patriots*, 124.

⁴ Frey and Frey, "The Reign of the Charlatans Is Over", 721.

⁵ Belissa, 'War and Diplomacy (1792–1795)', 427.

republicanizing of all countries, and their union with France, were the only political views which could safely be expressed in Paris. These ambitious ideas of taking the world by storm were universally diffused.⁶

It is certainly right that the French republican government supported revolutionary movements in all countries under the control of the enemies of France. The question is, however, whether this was also true in neutral states. When assessing the French republican attitude towards an active propagation of revolutionary ideology, the case of the strategically most important neutral state for the French, the Ottoman Empire, should not be neglected. This chapter, therefore, first discovers the genesis of the claim in historiography that French revolutionary diplomacy tried to initiate a regime change in the Ottoman Empire, by tracing it back to the manifold rumours circulating within the diplomatic community of the Ottoman capital. Then it focuses on the means by which French diplomats tried to counter and, in their eyes, rectify unfavourable reports on the events of the French Revolution and the views of French revolutionaries. Finally, the contents of French propaganda publications are analysed in order to evaluate their seditious potential.

THE SPECTRE OF GLOBAL JACOBINISM

All the French diplomats who were sent to Istanbul from 1792 onwards can be considered fervent republicans, but none of them fits the description of a revolutionary crusader. In fact, they were even instructed to reassure the Sublime Porte that there was no danger of a propagation of revolutionary ideology among the Ottoman population (see Chapter 2).⁷

Nevertheless, until today, most historians believed that the activities of French diplomats in Istanbul aimed directly at a change to, or a destabilization of, the political system in the Ottoman Empire. Auguste Dry, for example, presented Descorches as a 'unique and curious figure'⁸ and as an 'exalted republican', who allegedly dreamed of 'republicanizing' Istanbul.⁹ Dry argued that Descorches was recalled after 9 Thermidor in order to replace him with a less combative person.¹⁰ In fact, it was the suspicion that he might be a traitor to the Revolution, and not his revolutionary extremism, that caused Descorches's recall (see Chapter 3). Bernard Lewis conveys a similar picture of Descorches, describing him as 'a fervent missionary of the Revolution, who did all he could to bring its message to the Levant'.¹¹ Stanford Shaw even claims that French republicans 'tried to provoke

⁶ Heinrich von Sybel, *History of the French Revolution* (London, 1867), vol. 2, 154–5.

⁷ 'The envoy of the French Republic shall take great care to reassure the divan . . . that the system of liberty which the French nation has adopted will not propagate in the lands of the Grand Seigneur.' See 'Mémoire pour servir d'instructions à Marie Descorches allant à Constantinople en qualité d'envoyé extraordinaire de la République française, près la Porte ottomane', CADN, Constantinople, Ambassade, Série B3, unfoliated.

⁸ Dry, *Soldats ambassadeurs sous le Directoire*, vol. 1, 403.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 404.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 409. Similarly Zinkeisen, *Geschichte des Osmanischen Reiches in Europa*, vol. 6, 881.

¹¹ Lewis, 'The Impact of the French Revolution on Turkey', 114.

riots among the volatile Istanbul mob as a means of exerting pressure on the Turkish government to support the new regime in France'.¹² Gérard Groc also suggests the possibility of Descorches trying to use popular unrest as a means of influencing the Sublime Porte, arguing that a revolt, in July 1791, had hastened the conclusion of peace.¹³ However, would a French diplomat—who had a very difficult standing in Istanbul and who was not even officially recognized—really have dared to incite the population of the Ottoman capital? Moreover, why would he do so, when the need to recover from the instability caused by the last war was one of the main reasons for the Ottoman government to defer a war with Austria and Russia?¹⁴

What Sybel, Dry, Lewis, Shaw, and a number of other historians describing French propaganda activities as missionary and aiming at a 'republicanization' of the Ottoman Empire have in common is that they all drew upon Johann Wilhelm Zinkeisen's *History of the Ottoman Empire in Europe*.¹⁵ Zinkeisen, in turn, based his account of French revolutionary activities in Istanbul on the diplomatic correspondence he had studied in Prussian archives. Unfortunately, however, Zinkeisen did not subject his sources to any criticism.

In September 1792, for example, the Prussian envoy to Istanbul, Knobelsdorf, had received a document from a Dutch colleague,¹⁶ which was supposed to contain the French government's instructions to ambassador Sémonville. According to this document, Sémonville was to receive 8 million livres for his mission, 2 million of which were earmarked for the sole purpose of bribing the Ottoman government. To put the magnitude of these numbers in context, the actual annual secret expenses of Descorches in 1794 totalled around 75,000 livres. This is less than a hundredth of 8 million livres and around a twenty-sixth of 2 million.¹⁷ Moreover, Sémonville was expected 'to force the sultan into war [against Austria and Russia], by instigating the rabble of the capital'. Furthermore, the French ambassador was ordered to negotiate an exile for all French revolutionaries on a Mediterranean island, in case things turned against them in France.¹⁸ The document's dubious origin notwithstanding, Zinkeisen did not doubt its authenticity and veracity.¹⁹

¹² Shaw, *Between Old and New*, 195.

¹³ Groc, 'Propagande révolutionnaire et presse française à Constantinople à la fin du XVIIIe siècle', 801.

¹⁴ See Chapter 3. Stanford Shaw writes about the numerous instances of political instability in the Ottoman Empire: 'To enumerate and describe them all would be a complicated, unending, and fruitless task, yet to leave the subject without discussing . . . would be to ignore an essential portion of Ottoman history at that time.' See Shaw, *Between Old and New*, 214.

¹⁵ Zinkeisen, *Geschichte des Osmanischen Reiches in Europa*, vol. 6.

¹⁶ The Dutch ambassador Dedam was considered a supporter of the Dutch patriot party and therefore pro-French. The British ambassador Ainslie even considered him a Jacobin. Ainslie to Grenville, 10 September 1793, TNA, FO 78/14, fol. 216.

¹⁷ 'État de dépenses secrètes', first quarter 1794, MAE, CP Turquie 188, fol. 35; 'État de dépenses secrètes', third quarter 1794, MAE, CP Turquie 189, fol. 128; 'État de dépenses secrètes', fourth quarter 1794, MAE, CP Turquie 190, fol. 116.

¹⁸ Zinkeisen, *Geschichte des Osmanischen Reiches in Europa*, vol. 6, 849–50.

¹⁹ Subsequently, Ignace de Testa, quoting extensively from Zinkeisen, also cited this document in his compilation of foreign treaties of the Ottoman Empire. See Testa (ed.), *Recueil des traités de la Porte ottomane*, vol. 2, 202–3.

He furthermore quoted the Prussian envoy, who reported in 1793 that Descorches had declared: 'If the Republic fell, he would re-establish it in the Ottoman Empire.'²⁰

Although Zinkeisen should have been more critical with regard to the reports of the Prussian envoy (who had every motive to depict the French diplomats in Istanbul as dangerous villains), he can at least be excused for not having compared his findings with material from the archives of the French foreign ministry, because at the time they were not open to him.²¹ However, later historians, benefitting from access to the archives and to a great amount of literature based on archival findings, should not have had any difficulties in discerning and assessing the rumours and false information circulating in the diplomatic community of Istanbul.²² Such rumours were often reported in different variations at different times and in different circumstances. Thus, for example, Stanford Shaw is not referring to Zinkeisen when he writes about the French trying to provoke riots among the Ottoman population. He refers to a report of the British ambassador Ainslie, written in early 1794.²³ Such accounts constituted an important part of the anti-French discourse.

One of the most common motifs of this discourse was the notion that French revolutionaries and their sympathizers were continuously plotting to bring unrest and riots to every corner of the world. The other central element was the assumption that French revolutionaries were obsessed with the idea of proselytizing their ideology and revolutionizing the political systems wherever they went. Their 'subversive reputation always preceded' French revolutionary diplomats, wherever they went.²⁴ For example, the British ambassador Liston reported on Descorches:

He [Descorches] talked of *l'art de soulever les peuples* . . . ; and he boasted of his success in the practice of it: the original revolt of the people of Liege, the revolution and late insurrection in Poland, he claimed as the works of his ministry in those countries; he was not averse from acknowledging a share in the recent conspiracy in Hungary; the plan of a French officer (lately discovered) for burning the Russian fleet in the Black Sea, appears to have been primarily suggested and successively promoted by him; and he has gone as far as his ignorance of eastern languages and the strong existing prejudices would permit, in propagating a spirit of discontent, and ideas of republican independence, in different parts of the Ottoman Empire.²⁵

²⁰ Dispatch by Knobelsdorf, 10 June 1793, quoted in Zinkeisen, *Geschichte des Osmanischen Reiches in Europa*, vol. 6, 864.

²¹ Cf. Sybel, 'La Propagande révolutionnaire', 104.

²² In this context, I would also like to bring up again the forged report of Saint-Just to the Committee of Public Safety, which I have already mentioned in Chapter 2. This pamphlet, which slandered the foreign policy of the French government, in particular with regard to neutral states, made its first appearance in Istanbul in August 1794. It seems to have been in circulation for quite a time, since, in January 1795, Descorches felt urged to publish a denunciation of it, denouncing it as a libel. See Herbert to Thugut, 25 August 1794, HHStA, Türkei II, 107, July–September, fol. 291; Descorches's Bulletin, 31 January 1795, HHStA, Türkei II, 109, January–March, fol. 129.

²³ Shaw, *Between Old and New*, 452; cf. Ainslie to Grenville, 10 February 1794, TNA, FO 78/15, fol. 23.

²⁴ Martin, 'La Diplomatie en Révolution', vol. 2, 684.

²⁵ Liston to Grenville, 25 April 1795, TNA, FO 78/16, fol. 93. Emphasis in original.

Their opponents denounced the French revolutionaries as natural enemies of every form of order and regularity. In early 1793, for example, the British ambassador Ainslie labelled three young British merchants sympathizing with the Revolution as 'friends of anarchy' who were suffering from 'French mania'.²⁶ One year later, he reported to his government that the French envoy was conspiring to bring about a riot in Istanbul's city quarter Pera:

It cannot be doubted, that the famous Descorches and his Jacobins have succeeded in forming extensive connections with their brethren the Jews, and amongst the corrupt Greeks, through whom are conducted a great variety of intrigues, all tending to establish their personal credit, to extend their influence amongst the Turks, and to subvert the tranquillity of this residence. Already they have made such progress, chiefly amongst the populace, as to account themselves superior in force to the numerous Russian missions, soldiers and servants included, whom they provoke to aggression, most probably in view to create a general riot in Pera . . .²⁷

Two months earlier, the representative of the French royalists, Chalgrin, had already made a similar statement accusing Istanbul's Jews of being accomplices of the French republicans.²⁸ Anti-French ministers shared the opinion that French diplomats were plotting to bring about riots. The Austrian ambassador reported repeatedly in this vein: 'There is no doubt that Descorches seeks to stir up the subjects of this empire under the banner of freedom and equality.'²⁹ In the spring of 1794, bandits menaced the area around Edirne and raided a number of villages, causing large crowds of Greek and Turkish families to seek refuge within the city walls. Diplomats in Istanbul were quick to blame French revolutionaries for these raids, although in fact nobody knew the identity of the bandits.³⁰ The Austrian ambassador received the (not very reliable) information that the French envoy sought to counter these accusations by assuring the Sublime Porte that the bandits were on the payroll of the anti-French Coalition.³¹

Three years later, major riots broke out in Izmir, where the non-Muslim quarters of the city were set on fire and plundered. The British chargé d'affaires in Istanbul, Spencer Smith, considered these cruel events the result of a conspiracy, 'and that conspiracy a consequence of the destructive doctrines so progressive in the present day; and so industriously inculcated both by precept and example during the long stay of the French squadron in the Levant this war, particularly in Smyrna'.³²

²⁶ Ainslie to Grenville, 10 January 1793, TNA, FO 78/14, fols. 4–5.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, fol. 23.

²⁸ Chalgrin to Flachslanden, 16 December 1793, HHStA, Türkei II, 105, December, fol. 96. Contemporary (Christian) Europeans were in large part anti-Jewish. Therefore, it is not surprising that Chalgrin accuses Jews of (in his eyes) criminal activities. See Annekathrin Helbig, 'Judenfeindschaft', in Friedrich Jaeger (ed.), *Enzyklopädie der Neuzeit*, 16 vols. (Stuttgart, 2007), vol. 6, 87–92.

²⁹ Herbert to Thugut, 25 September 1794, HHStA, Türkei II, 107, July–September, fol. 442.

³⁰ André Terrasson to Ainslie, 12 March 1794, TNA, FO 78/15, fol. 59.

³¹ Maret to Herbert, 29 March 1794, HHStA, Türkei II, 106, January–March, fol. 3.

³² Smith to Grenville, 16 April 1797, TNA, FO 78/18, fol. 63.

Although the French inhabitants of Izmir were just as badly affected by the riots as others, Smith reported that they had been treated differently:

[It] is to be observed as a singularity offering awful abundance of reflection that the French tricolour cockade served as an inviolable safeguard during the whole tragedy of the 15th and was, with an appearance of humanity, recommended and granted as such by Laumont their consul. Certain it is that the company of janissaries, numbered 31, whose headquarters are at Smyrna, is famed for such an obnoxious innovation as the honorary enrolment of a number of Frenchmen beginning with the late agent, Descorches: and who now in Constantinople make the number of this *Orta* [janissary unit] (in Turkish, *Otooz-Bir* [otuz-bir]) a cant word to recognize their partisans.³³ I am assured that the loss of the Republican French is not so great in proportion as that of most other nations . . .³⁴

The British chargé d'affaires, it seems, was depending upon quite a lot of inconsistent hearsay when he reported the circumstances of the Izmir riots. In the French archives, I found no hint of an honorary enrolment of Descorches in any janissary unit—which in any event would certainly not have met with the approval of the Ottoman government. Nevertheless, this account fits very well into the anti-revolutionary discourse that suspected 'French ideas' or French agents behind every kind of insubordination or public disorder. This prevailing climate even made it possible for the Austrian ambassador to refer to the Wahhabi movement on the Arabian Peninsula as 'Wahhabi Jacobins'.³⁵

Thus, when analysing the accounts of anti-French diplomats, one should always keep in mind the prior assumptions and preconditions that shaped their perception and interpretation of events, just as one should do with regard to French sources. Diplomats of the Coalition were expected to see French revolutionaries as rebels and enemies to any kind of political order; and they were expected to convey this view—the universal danger of French revolutionary ideology—to their Ottoman interlocutors. Ambassador Liston, for example, was instructed to 'explain to them that those [French revolutionary] principles aim at nothing less than the subversion of all the established religions and forms of government in the whole world, by means the most atrocious which the mind of man could ever conceive'.³⁶

An essential task for legations of the anti-French Coalition was the transmission, through different channels, of every kind of information that could harm the reputation of the French. The truthfulness of such information was of secondary importance.³⁷ For this purpose, the Austrian ambassador Herbert even hired a spy

³³ The British chargé, it seems, was unaware of the fact that *otuz bir* (thirty-one) was and is still today used as an (Ottoman-) Turkish cant word for masturbation, which, if ascribed to a person (*otuz birçi*), is a strong insult.

³⁴ Smith to Grenville, 16 April 1797, TNA, FO 78/18, fol. 63. Emphases in original.

³⁵ Herbert to Thugut, 10 February 1794, HHStA, Türkei II, 106, January–March, fol. 169. In the French original, he uses the term 'Jacobins Vehabis'.

³⁶ Instructions for Ambassador Liston, 26 February 1794, TNA, FO 78/15, fol. 47.

³⁷ In the Russian foreign archives, too, one can find alarming reports on the spread of Jacobinism both in the Ottoman government and in the population. See Arş [Arch], 'L'Influence de la Révolution française dans les Balkans', 35.

among the French, a certain Citizen Maret, who was secretly paid to sow discord within the French community and to report on its internal transactions. This Maret, a master of exaggeration, delivered to the Austrians exactly what they needed. When, in October 1793, the French experienced difficulties in maintaining their frigates at station in Izmir, Maret spread a rumour that Descorches was illegally trying to sell the ships to the Sublime Porte. He also approached Descorches's adversary Hénin, who immediately notified the foreign minister. Hénin had previously claimed that 'Monsieur Descorches seems to act in concert with our enemies in order to get us into quarrels with the Porte.'³⁸ Now, Hénin reported that he had heard from Maret (who heard it from some Armenians) that Descorches wanted to sell the four frigates in Izmir. Moreover, Hénin reported that Descorches was suspected of having secret contacts with the ministers of Prussia and Austria, and that he was requesting from the latter a safe retreat in Austria.³⁹ Such examples of misinformation circulated in manifold versions in the European expatriate communities in the Ottoman Empire;⁴⁰ and although many of them are easily identifiable as false, historians nevertheless sometimes still make the mistake of taking them at face value.⁴¹ In the case of Citizen Maret, even Hénin, who had an interest in believing all libels against Descorches, grew suspicious eventually.⁴²

Speculation about the retreat of important French personalities to the Ottoman Empire, or from there to somewhere else, was a further ingredient simmering in Istanbul's cauldron of rumours. Descorches, as we have seen, was suspected of negotiating for asylum in Austria. In February 1794, Maret insinuated to Hénin that former French Foreign Minister Lebrun had announced to Descorches that he would come to Istanbul with a view of escaping to Russia.⁴³ One month earlier, the British ambassador reported that it was 'presumed that the Jacobins, despairing of the Republic, and apprehensive for their personal safety are chiefly intent upon securing the most advantageous retreat in this country, whose religion and interests they may find it convenient to adopt'.⁴⁴ As noted above, a similar 'Jacobin plan' to escape to the Ottoman Empire if the Revolution failed in France was already part of Sémonville's fake instructions from 1792, quoted by Zinkeisen.⁴⁵

The additional supposition that the revolutionaries would willingly embrace Islam was also a recurring motif. People who had committed one of the greatest possible sacrileges by killing their king, and who in the eyes of the counter-revolutionaries had already renounced every religion, were only too likely to give

³⁸ Hénin to Foreign Minister, 10 October 1793, MAE, CP Turquie 186, fol. 96.

³⁹ Hénin to Foreign Minister, 15 October 1793, MAE, CP Turquie 186, fol. 115. Hénin admitted that he had not a single proof of these allegations.

⁴⁰ The British ambassador also reported the sale of the French frigates. He thought that the loan given to Descorches by the sultan was in fact a partial payment for the ships. See Ainslie to Grenville, 10 October 1793, TNA, FO 78/14, fols. 250–1.

⁴¹ Cf. Gérard Groc, 'La Méditerranée, une ouverture diplomatique de la Révolution française en Orient', in Christiane Villain-Gandossi (ed.), *Méditerranée, mer ouverte. Actes du colloque de Marseille (21–23 septembre 1995)*, 2 vols. (Malta, 1997), vol. 1, 123–30, 128.

⁴² Hénin to Foreign Minister, 18 February 1794, MAE, CP Turquie 187, fol. 104.

⁴³ Ibid. ⁴⁴ Ainslie to Grenville, 25 January 1794, TNA, FO 78/15, fol. 17.

⁴⁵ Zinkeisen, *Geschichte des Osmanischen Reiches in Europa*, vol. 6, 849–50.

a further proof of their ultimate betrayal by becoming what Europeans termed 'renegades'.⁴⁶ Thus, when Descorches was recalled, both the Austrian ambassador Baron Herbert-Rathkeal and the French royalist representative Chalgrin suspected that Descorches would not return to France, but try to become naturalized in the Ottoman Empire.⁴⁷

FRENCH PROPAGANDA AS COUNTER-PROPAGANDA

In his first report to Baron Herbert-Rathkeal, in July 1793, Citizen Maret notified his employer that the French in Istanbul had held an assembly at which they deliberated upon forcing the Ottoman Empire to declare itself finally as friend or foe of the Republic. If the Ottomans refused to take a stand, the French were disposed to invade either Cyprus or Egypt.⁴⁸ Presenting an account like this to the Ottoman government was an opportunity to diminish French credit with the Sublime Porte. It seems, however, that giving a truthful account of the singular turmoil in France may have been equally effective. To prevent a Franco-Ottoman alliance, it was probably enough simply to pass on to the Ottoman government all the reports about riots in Paris and in the provinces, the complete overthrow of the old order, the political instability, the changing governments, the reversals of the war, and the French revolutionary flirtation with atheism. Therefore, for the French, all news arriving in Istanbul from Western Europe was potentially harmful, especially when it came from enemy newspapers. In the spring of 1794, French Commissaire Thainville reported:

We do not receive any news except that which comes from the impure source of the Coalition . . . It is of the utmost usefulness to present to the Turks the antidote . . . The infamous gazettes of Leiden and Cologne, the Courier of the Lower Rhine are the only public papers that arrive here.⁴⁹

As a consequence, it became critically important for French diplomats to oppose counter-revolutionary reports with a forceful machinery of pro-French propaganda. Descorches was referring to this concern when he informed the foreign minister about his first meeting with the *reis efendi*. On the way home from the conference, the chief dragoman of the Sublime Porte, Prince Murusi, had asked Descorches many questions about the progress of the war and about the current government of France. The French envoy had received the impression that the prince entertained certain prejudices with regard to the Republic and that these prejudices were a result of enemy propaganda. He believed that the lack of (what he considered to be)

⁴⁶ On the term 'renegade' in early modern Europe, see Graf, 'I Am Still Yours', 17–23.

⁴⁷ Herbert to Thugut, 24 March 1795, HHStA, Türkei II, 109, January–March, fol. 306; Chalgrin to Flachslanden, 9 May 1795, HHStA, Türkei II, 109, April–June, fol. 155.

⁴⁸ Herbert to Thugut, 10 July 1793, HHStA, Türkei II, 103, July, fol. 25.

⁴⁹ Thainville to Foreign Minister, 19 April 1794, MAE, CP Turquie 187, fol. 396. It should be mentioned that at the time when Thainville wrote this report, the republican 'antidote' was already in circulation (see later).

reliable information about the events in France was an important factor causing the hesitant attitude of the Ottoman government towards French advances:

I cannot refrain from telling you, citizen minister, that some good information, which I would like to ask you to send me regularly, . . . could serve us quite well in every respect. At the Porte, we have to continuously thwart the intrigues of our enemies whose correspondence is numerous and active and who can say whatever they want . . . while we cannot re-establish the truth by the positive statement of facts.⁵⁰

Descorches furthermore claimed that an improved transmission of news from France would not only benefit his own diplomatic mission, but would also foster the patriotic zeal of French citizens in the Levant.⁵¹ It was this state of things that produced a real innovation in the diplomatic community of Istanbul:⁵² a propaganda news bulletin, which later developed into the first periodical newspaper ever produced in the Ottoman Empire.⁵³

Since there was a lack of positive news on the French Revolution in Istanbul, the French envoy started to write (or reproduce) and to circulate news himself. At first, in September 1793, he started by reprinting French newspaper articles using the printing press of the French embassy, which had been installed under ambassador Choiseul-Gouffier.⁵⁴ Then, probably for economic reasons, and also owing to repeated disputes with the embassy's printer (who returned to France in November 1793), Descorches proceeded to produce a manuscript bulletin. The French envoy thus made a virtue of necessity, as the manuscript form allowed him to produce slightly different versions of the bulletins in different languages and for different groups of readers (the French communities, the Sublime Porte, Ottoman governors in the provinces).⁵⁵ The production of the manuscript bulletin probably started in November 1793.⁵⁶

Every fortnight, just after the arrival of the postal courier from Vienna, Descorches would compile his bulletin and have it circulated.⁵⁷ The bulletins varied in length. They often filled four manuscript pages and it can be assumed that they were distributed on double-sheet paper, so that one sheet, inscribed on every side, would suffice for a complete copy of the bulletin. Although, at the beginning, the French envoy experienced difficulties in receiving enough news from France (as a

⁵⁰ Descorches to Foreign Minister, 26 September 1793, MAE, CP Turquie 186, fol. 26.

⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵² This innovation was not the brilliant invention of Descorches alone. It was already suggested in foreign minister Lebrun's general instructions to all French diplomats. See Aulard, 'Documents inédits', 70. Moreover, the use of written or printed propaganda was already a common aspect of diplomatic activity during the reign of Louis XIV. See Lucien Bély, 'Les Temps modernes. 1515–1789', in Françoise Autrand et al. (eds.), *Histoire de la diplomatie française*, 2 vols. (Paris, 2007), vol. 1, 181–470, 403–4.

⁵³ Groc, 'Les Premiers Contacts de l'Empire ottoman avec la message de la Révolution française (1789–1798)', 31.

⁵⁴ Herbert to Thugut, 10 September 1793, HHStA, Türkei II, 104, September, fol. 46.

⁵⁵ Herbert to Thugut, 25 September 1794, HHStA, Türkei II, 107, July–September, fol. 442. For a facsimile of an Ottoman version of the news bulletin, see Groc, 'La Traduction, clef de la diplomatie révolutionnaire à Constantinople', 347.

⁵⁶ Herbert to Thugut, 25 November 1793, HHStA, Türkei II, 104, November, fol. 93.

⁵⁷ Descorches to Foreign Minister, 14 January 1794, MAE, CP Turquie 186, fol. 501.

result of an Austrian embargo),⁵⁸ he was soon suspected of being the best-informed diplomat in Istanbul.⁵⁹ The Austrian ambassador described the production and distribution of the French bulletin as follows:

[He] is paying . . . a dozen writers who multiply the copies of the French and Turkish texts, which are then distributed by hawkers in all neighbourhoods of this capital, among all classes of inhabitants and also disseminated outside by Tartars [i.e. horse-couriers], messengers, travellers, and by sea; so that this cunning and hypocritical villain has found ways to communicate twice a month with all parts of the Ottoman Empire while lulling the Porte to sleep over the dangers of this disastrous influence.⁶⁰

It seems improbable that copies of the French bulletin were indeed handed out to the Ottoman population in every corner of Istanbul. The number of manuscript bulletins was much too small to allow the French to distribute them randomly. The republican envoy, it seems, gave very clear instructions on where and to whom his bulletin was to be delivered. Moreover, according to the French royalist representative Chalgrin, Descorches had given orders to 'the Jews and the other emissaries in his pay' to return the bulletins to him after having used them in accordance with his instructions.⁶¹ Thus, copies of the bulletin were, on the one hand, distributed to important personages in the Ottoman capital and even in the provinces⁶² and, on the other hand, read out in coffeehouses of the Ottoman capital—or possibly only in the 'Frankish' quarters of the city north of the Golden Horn. After the bulletins had been read out, they were probably returned to the French legation for reuse. The Austrian spy Maret described this procedure similarly, albeit in his very characteristic manner:

[Descorches] often sent his dragoman Poutschik [Pušić] into the cafés of Constantinople to publicize the imaginary successes of the sans-culottes, praising the charms of republican government, and those of liberty and equality. If the Grand Seigneur and all his ministers were not the first Jacobins of the Ottoman Empire, the Porte would stop the aforementioned Poutschik, and cut off his head today rather than tomorrow, without any form of trial, as he is already too guilty by his infernal intentions; he also roams around in Pera, Galata, and Tophane preaching everywhere the same principles.⁶³

That coffeehouses (see Figure 6.1) played a role in the dissemination of French propaganda can also be seen from an account of the secret expenditures of the French legation, which record the sum of 25 piastres given to a coffeehouse owner who helped in distributing Descorches's bulletins.⁶⁴ It is interesting, however, that

⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁹ Herbert to Thugut, 25 August 1794, HHStA, Türkei II, 107, July–September, fol. 291. Descorches never shared this opinion.

⁶⁰ Herbert to Thugut, 10 December 1794, HHStA, Türkei II, 108, fol. 313.

⁶¹ Chalgrin to Flachslanden, 16 January 1794, HHStA, Türkei II, 106, January–March, fol. 58.

⁶² The French Republic's representative in Arta (today's north-western Greece) Paul Tosoni, for example, had established ties with Ali Pasha of Yannina (Tepedelenli Ali Paşa), and asked Descorches for a Turkish, or even better, a Greek version of the bulletin, for the use of Ali Pasha—and a French version for himself. See Paul Tosoni to Descorches, 18 July 1794, MAE, CP Turquie 188, fol. 316.

⁶³ Maret to Herbert, 12 December 1793, HHStA, Türkei II, 105, December, fol. 24.

⁶⁴ Secret expenditures of the French legation in Istanbul, first quarter 1794, MAE, CP Turquie 186, fol. 544.

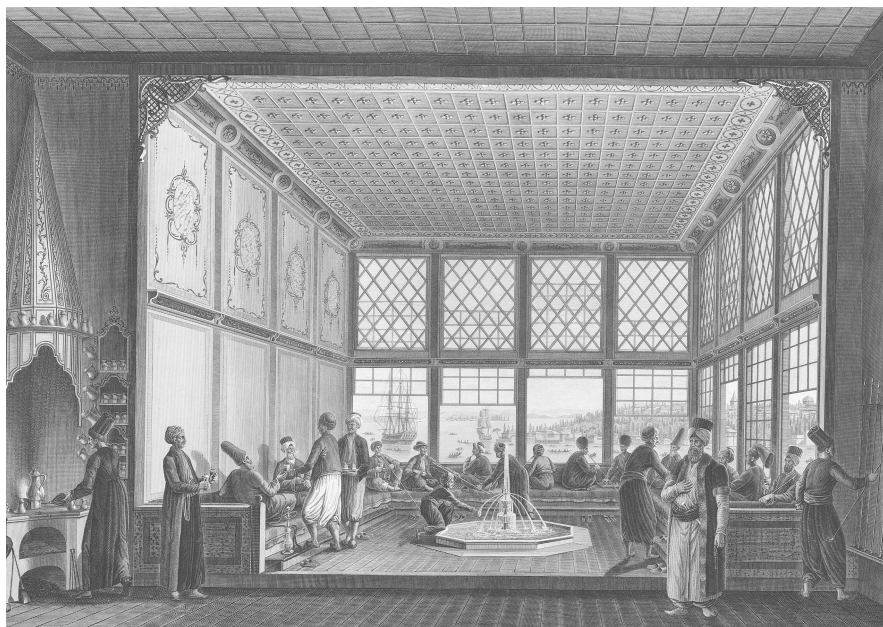


Figure 6.1 Contemporary depiction of a coffeehouse in Tophane. Antoine Ignace Melling, 'Intérieur d'un café public sur la place de Top-hane', in Antoine Ignace Melling, *Voyage pittoresque de Constantinople et des rives du Bosphore* (Paris, 1809), unpaginated. Digital image courtesy of the Getty's Open Content Program.

the expenses for the collaborators copying the bulletin were not listed among the secret expenditures.

THE FRENCH NEWS BULLETIN

The French propaganda machinery was a great innovation in Istanbul and it was quite successful, if the judgement of diplomats from both the revolutionary and the counter-revolutionary camps can be believed. The British ambassador, Liston, for example, was highly impressed by Descorches's propaganda activities. Although Liston's praise for his adversary could be interpreted in part as a pretext for demanding more funds to counteract the French envoy's efforts, it is nevertheless worth quoting from his report at length, since it is a very concise example of how an enemy ambassador perceived the French 'threat' in Istanbul:

The Jacobin rulers of Paris appeared to have formed the combined project of predominating in the councils of this [Ottoman] government and perverting the minds of the people. And men to whom no channel seems impervious, no enterprise too chimerical, found in Descorches an operator equal to the task . . .

The Proteus Descorches, from the moment of his arrival, showed himself equally determined and indefatigable in maintaining his ground against schismatic accomplices, active in disseminating the tempting doctrine of fraternity among those who cannot but gain, and dextrous in gilding the pill to those who have anything to lose. With an hypocritical humility and invincible phlegm, he has digested insults, and returned to the charge after multiplied disappointments, with a constancy which has at last prevailed: and while he made perpetual sacrifices to the ruling passions of individuals of all ranks, he at the same time made such offers to anticipate the wants of the state as could hardly fail to captivate the good will of the sovereign.

One great engine employed by him has been (that early measure of the French Revolution) the spreading of alarms, keeping up the apprehension of danger, by successive reports calculated to serve his purpose, and then taking the opportunity to press the idea that France is the only country to which the Turks can look for effectual assistance. The general ignorance of the people of this country, and the total want of the circulation of newspapers, gives this species of industry a seducing advantage; so that he perfectly succeeded for some time in proving the hostile views of Russia, as he now does in demonstrating that the French have upon the whole a decided superiority over the allies, and that there can be no doubt of the ultimate establishment of the republican government. These points are laboured by a regular *bulletin*, which he gets translated into Turkish, and sent about and read in the coffeehouses in Constantinople . . .

He is well seconded in this branch, and in his general views, by the activity of his various classes of missionaries among the lower ranks of the people; and the propagation of democratic principles is, I am assured, extremely rapid.

When it is considered, My Lord, that all the industry and art has been exerted on one side only, and that the profusion of presents and money which has been distributed has not been in any degree counterbalanced by similar means on the other, it is perhaps less to be wondered at that so much favour has been shown to the French, than that the marks of it have not been more decided . . .

The Turkish government will surely open their eyes at last to the consequences of the propagation of the principles of independence and democracy among the lower orders of the people, if it be true, as it is affirmed, that there are several French republicans mixed with the insurgents in the neighbourhood of Adrianople [Edirne], who have once more assembled, and taken the field in considerable numbers.⁶⁵

It seems that the French envoy had made good use of his scarce funds, since his enemies reported that he had greater amounts of money at his disposal than they themselves.⁶⁶ In fact, Descorches may have spent more money on 'secret' or 'extraordinary' expenses than his British colleague, but significantly less than the Austrian ambassador.⁶⁷ Furthermore, as Ambassador Liston's report shows,

⁶⁵ Liston to Grenville, 3 July 1794, TNA, FO 78/15, fols. 183–6. Emphasis in original.

⁶⁶ The representative of the French *émigré* government, Chalgrin, claimed, for example, that Descorches had been in the possession of money and jewels worth 25 million livres, which he used in large part for bribing Ottoman officials. See Chalgrin an Flachslanden, 25 September 1794, HHStA, Türkei II, 107, July–September, fol. 448.

⁶⁷ Between 1790 and 1794, Liston's predecessor Ainslie spent on average about 5,600 piastres per year. His Austrian colleague Herbert-Rathkeal spent, in the year between 1 November 1793 and

diplomats of the anti-French Coalition were convinced that their French adversaries tried to propagate 'democratic principles' among the Ottoman population. Many historians took up this judgement, as noted earlier. The actual propagandistic message of the French in the Ottoman Empire, however, was a decidedly different one. The Ottoman Empire was not an enemy state but a traditional strategic partner in French power politics. Producing propaganda with a view to revolutionizing the Ottoman state had no purpose, since France wanted an alliance with the current regime and not with a future one. Therefore, French propaganda in the dominions of the sultan differed greatly from revolutionary propaganda in enemy states.⁶⁸

One of the most important distinctions between French propaganda activities in the Levant and those elsewhere was the fact that a French diplomat was initiating and coordinating them. Descorches claimed that, in accordance with his instructions, improving the standing of the French cause in the Ottoman Empire was the main aim of his bulletins: 'I write them myself and I guarantee you, citizen, that they remained and will remain within the realm of our principles, our republican virtues, and the intentions of the government, who wishes to convey to others the consideration which it so justly claims for itself.'⁶⁹

In other European states, local sympathizers with the Revolution carried out most pro-French propaganda activities. Some of them had fled to France and organized from there their resistance against the 'oppressors' of their home country (this was the case, for example, for the Dutch and Belgian Patriots).⁷⁰ These sympathizers were of course highly interested in furthering a change of regime in their home countries. The French diplomats in the Ottoman Empire, on the other hand, had very different priorities, and the first and foremost was to gain the confidence of the Ottoman regime—a goal that clearly conflicted with any policy aiming at the change of the existing political system.

The contents that Descorches and his successor Verninac chose for publication reveal quite clearly a propagandistic objective. The vast majority of the articles inserted into the bulletin were reports from the raging revolutionary war. Here, of course, the focus lay on the victories of the French armies. These were described in detail, while military failures were mentioned, but generally downplayed. Other central topics were the diplomatic developments in Europe and the achievements of the French government in the interior. The persuasive goal of all three types of news items (war news, European politics, and internal French successes) was to

31 October 1794, about 42,500 piastres. Descorches's spending in 1794 amounted to about 25,200 piastres, extrapolated from three quarterly reports. It should be noted, however, that these numbers, if compared, have only limited informative value, because the various missions followed different guidelines in what they defined as 'extraordinary' or 'secret' expenses. On the British 'expenditure for secret services', see TNA, FO 78/15, fols. 123–6. On the 'extraordinary or secret' expenses of the Austrian mission, see HHStA, Türkei II, 108, fol. 93 and HHStA, Türkei II, 109, January–March, fol. 226. On the French 'secret expenses', see MAE, CP Turquie 188, fol. 35; MAE, CP Turquie 189, fol. 128; MAE, CP Turquie 190, fol. 116.

⁶⁸ On press propaganda with regard to other states, see e.g. Godechot, *La grande nation*, 106–11.

⁶⁹ Descorches to Commissaire of External Relations, 10 October 1794, MAE, CP Turquie 189, fol. 76.

⁷⁰ Godechot, *La Grande Nation*, 107.

form the view of the Ottoman reader on French and European affairs in such a way that the Ottomans would 'realize' that their interests and the interests of France were interwoven. This is what ambassador Liston described as pressing 'the idea that France is the only country to which the Turks can look for effectual assistance'.⁷¹ The bulletin of 22 June 1794 illustrates this very clearly. It begins with the words: 'Victory is permanent among the armies of the Republic.'⁷² Then, it goes on to report the latest war events in detail and at length, front by front. After this, the bulletin concludes with the following observations:

In the eyes of enlightened and attentive observers, who have long since reckoned with the invincible resistance of a great people that knows its rights . . . , the fate of the French Republic is already too clearly decided for them to attach any particular attention to the events of the war against France. [Informed observers] are much more interested in what is happening in other states; they follow the progress of public opinion in England which speaks out ever more strongly against the odious and pernicious system of its government; they study the consequences of the armed league formed in the north by Sweden and Denmark to defend their just independence against the arrogance of ambitious powers that want to submit everything to their caprices; finally, they consider the great and beautiful national movement, by which all of Poland has just started rebelling against Russian brigandage, the germ of the happiest developments. This insurrection, writes a Dutch gazette, is particularly unfortunate for the interests of Russia, as [Poland] could become a chain of communication between the north and the Ottoman power.⁷³

As this excerpt makes evident, the French bulletin was an instrument of propaganda that aimed systematically to influence the opinion of its readers. However, it did so only with regard to foreign policy, not the political system of the Ottoman state. In the quotation, the bulletin presents French military success as a given and wants to turn the attention of the 'informed and attentive observer' to the political developments in northern and eastern Europe, where Poland, Denmark, and Sweden might be ready to unite with the Ottoman Empire to defend their independence against Russia (one of the 'ambitious powers that want to submit everything to their caprices'). The purpose of these remarks on European politics was to suggest an Ottoman participation in an anti-Russian alliance of buffer states, which was one of the key projects of French foreign policy (see Chapter 3).⁷⁴ Furthermore, this excerpt shows that the bulletin did not have an essentially anti-monarchist stance. According to its portrayal of the circumstances of the war, the French nation was hostile towards the allied kings not because they were kings, but because they were

⁷¹ Liston to Grenville, 3 July 1794, TNA, FO 78/15, fols. 184. See quotation above.

⁷² Descorches's Bulletin, 22 June 1794, HHStA, Türkei II, 107, June, fol. 372.

⁷³ Descorches's Bulletin, 22 June 1794, HHStA, Türkei II, 107, June, fol. 373 and TNA, FO 78/15, fols. 190–1.

⁷⁴ This was not the first time the bulletin urged the Ottoman Empire to take a more active role in European politics. In late 1793, after reporting the conclusion of a treaty of armed neutrality between Sweden and Denmark, the bulletin remarks: 'what a glorious and useful role could not the Ottoman Porte play in this general constellation'. See Descorches's Bulletin, 28 December 1793, HHStA, Türkei II, 105, December, fol. 133.

unjust and tyrannical and had tried to subjugate France. Other monarchies, such as Sweden and Denmark, were depicted much more favourably.

References to Ottoman politics were extremely rare in the French bulletin. Had the bulletin been, in fact, the seditious paper of the anti-French diplomats' denunciations, one would have expected a lot more commentary on the domestic government of the Ottoman Empire. This was not the case, since the French bulletin's main purpose was foreign policy propaganda. One of the very few occasions on which the bulletin mentioned domestic events of the Ottoman Empire came up when it reproduced an article of the French *Moniteur universel*, which essentially praised Selim III's reforms. The article started by mentioning the military reforms, then paid tribute to the sultan, the *kapudan paşa*, and the *reis efendi* for their outstanding abilities, and finally reported on the innovation of the arrival of a horse circus. Since the acrobats of this circus were Habsburg subjects, the Austrian ambassador had tried to ban Frenchmen from the performances. After protests from the French, the Ottoman government had interfered and declared the circus open to everybody.⁷⁵

The only purpose of the reproduction of this article in the bulletin was to flatter the Ottoman reader and in particular three main personages of the Ottoman government: the sultan, who was reported to visit his soldiers often 'and he encourages them even more with the zeal and interest with which he takes care of everything that can ensure the honour of the Ottoman armies'; the *kapudan paşa*, 'favourite and relative of the sultan, and, which honours both of them, the sultan has made him his friend'; and the *reis efendi*, '[who] distinguished himself by his eminent talents'.⁷⁶ It is therefore quite telling that one particular sentence at the beginning of the article in the *Moniteur universel* was omitted in Descorches's bulletin. After announcing that advantageous changes in the morals of the Turks became more marked, the *Moniteur* observed: 'European manners are gaining ground every day among them.'⁷⁷ It seems that Descorches deemed this statement potentially irritating to the Ottoman reader and therefore left it out. Presenting 'European manners' as something desirable was (and is) stating an opinion that is not universally shared. Announcing the introduction of Western manners into Ottoman society was problematic; doing the same for French revolutionary manners would be even more so.

The fact that the French bulletin was a very tame propaganda leaflet, focusing on foreign events, gives rise to the question, what made it attractive to Ottoman readers? Descorches's publication was probably so successful because it conveyed concise information about the most important events in Europe, and was available in the vernacular. Nevertheless, it seems that the popularity of the bulletin surprised even its author:

⁷⁵ Descorches's Bulletin, 11 March 1794, HHStA, Türkei II, 106, January–March, fol. 371.

⁷⁶ Ibid.

⁷⁷ 'Politique, Turquie. Extrait d'une lettre de Constantinople, du 10 novembre', *Moniteur universel*, No. 117, 16 January 1794.

The success of my bulletins increases, as you can imagine, with that of our arms. The eagerness with which they are requested and taken from me is truly curious: they have started circulating in the provinces, where they produce the same effect that always follows the truth wherever it is revealed.⁷⁸

His bulletin seemingly gained Descorches a reputation as an information broker on European affairs. The Ottomans consulted all Western diplomats on matters of European politics. Through his publication, however, Descorches could make himself heard even when he was not asked. Moreover, his publication sometimes created an occasion for consultation. When, for example, the *reis efendi* read in the bulletin in late 1794 a report of possible peace negotiations based on the Peace of Westphalia, he turned to the French envoy to enquire about the stipulations of the 1648 treaties.⁷⁹

Descorches used his privileged position to provide a selective picture of European political realities, a picture beneficial to French interests. For instance, the bulletin reported, in October 1794, that a new American ambassador had been sent to Paris. Certainly, this news was conveyed to the Ottomans in order to insinuate that other neutral states had recognized the French Republic already and entertained full diplomatic relations with it—and that, therefore, the Ottoman government should do the same.⁸⁰ For the same reason, the bulletin also reported the official reception of a French envoy extraordinary in Venice, a few months later.⁸¹

It was a particularly delicate task to present the government of the French Republic as a stable one, since this was obviously not the case. We may well doubt Descorches's announcement to his superiors that he had managed to convince the Ottoman government that the overthrow of Robespierre, on 9 Thermidor, was a proof of the stability of the new order:

The Turkish ministry was for a moment alarmed, but in my regular bulletins I was careful to gather all the facts, to put them in their place, and to explain them in a manner that brings out the most convincing evidence ever of the unshakable stability of our public spirit . . . It seems to me that my explanations had the effect I expected.⁸²

The French envoy depicted the events of 9 Thermidor as the downfall of a much esteemed statesman who 'like a second Catiline'⁸³ had become corrupted by power. His end had to come when he turned against the National Convention. News

⁷⁸ Descorches to Commissaire of External Relations, 10 October 1794, MAE, CP Turquie 189, fol. 76.

⁷⁹ Descorches to Commissaire of External Relations, 9 December 1794, MAE, CP Turquie 189, fol. 338.

⁸⁰ Descorches's Bulletin, 6 October 1794, HHStA, Türkei II, 108, fol. 19.

⁸¹ Descorches's Bulletin, 31 January 1795, HHStA, Türkei II, 109, January–March, fol. 129.

⁸² Descorches to Commission of External Relations, 9 September 1794, MAE, CP Turquie 188, fol. 561.

⁸³ Descorches's Bulletin, 7 September 1794, HHStA, Türkei II, 107, July–September, fol. 389. This allusion to the Catilinarian Conspiracy was probably lost on most Ottoman readers. It is, therefore, doubtful that it was kept in the Ottoman translation. The comparison of Robespierre with Catiline was first made by Tallien, in the speech which marked the beginning of the revolt of 9 Thermidor.

about French military successes and European politics framed the report on the overthrow of the Robespierriest regime.⁸⁴ This arrangement was probably chosen to downplay the significance of the commotions in Paris. In the aftermath of these events, Descorches tried to emphasize a positive and tranquil image of domestic government under the Thermidorian regime:

The news from the interior of the Republic is more satisfactory than it has ever been. Each day, confidence and general esteem are being attached to the National Convention, whose governing measures exhibit the combination of enlightenment and all the virtues that are suitable for the representation of a great people.⁸⁵

Portraying the political order in France as stable was an important objective of the French bulletin. This was crucial in order to convince the Ottoman government that it could safely enter into an alliance with France. The bulletin's second central purpose was to inform the French citizens in the Levant about the political changes in their home country and to encourage their loyalty to the new regime. In this respect, too, the bulletin was anything but seditious. It was the official news organ of the French authorities in the Levant and, as such, aimed to stabilize the new order after the regime change of 1792, by instructing Frenchmen about the new politics and new laws of France and thus winning them over to the cause of the Republic.⁸⁶ This, however, did not prevent the Austrian ambassador from observing that the bulletin continued 'to present the peculiarity of a licentious and revolutionary paper published under the sanction of a despotic government'.⁸⁷

FRENCH PROPAGANDA FOR FRENCH CITIZENS

The French legation used propaganda as a means to win the Ottoman government's favour towards an alliance, and to win French expatriates' loyalty to the Republic. It is in the latter context that one may understand the print publications of the French mission (Descorches had hired an Armenian printer after the defection of his French printer), which included the Constitution of the Year II, as well as the republican calendar. Both were distributed to French residents in different cities of the Ottoman Empire.⁸⁸ Another product of the French press was a short pamphlet, published in May 1794, entitled 'Maximes républicaines'. This was a highly abbreviated version of Robespierre's famous 'Rapport sur les principes de morale politique', delivered at the National Convention on 5 February 1794.⁸⁹

⁸⁴ Ibid., fols. 388–90. The bulletin begins with the words: 'Always victories, nothing but victories for the republican arms.'

⁸⁵ Descorches's Bulletin, 26 November 1794, HHStA, Türkei II, 108, fol. 315.

⁸⁶ Louis Lagarde, 'Note sur les journaux français de Constantinople à l'époque révolutionnaire', *Journal asiatique*, 235 (1948), 271–6, 274; Gérard Groc and İbrahim Çağlar, *La Presse française de Turquie de 1795 à nos jours. Histoire et catalogue* (Istanbul, 1985), 6.

⁸⁷ Herbert Thugut, 25 September 1794, HHStA, Türkei II, 107, July–September, fol. 442.

⁸⁸ Descorches to Foreign Minister, 9 May 1794, MAE, CP Turquie 187, fol. 521.

⁸⁹ 'Maximes Républicaines', HHStA, Türkei II, 106, April–May, fols. 258–9. Cf. Maximilien de Robespierre, 'Rapport sur les principes de morale politique qui doivent guider la Convention nationale

The Austrian ambassador (who probably had it from his spy Maret) reported that this pamphlet was being translated 'into every language' to stir up the population of Istanbul.⁹⁰ And indeed, the text begins with a definition of democracy: 'Democracy is a state in which the sovereign people, guided by laws which are of their own making, do for themselves all that they can well do, and by their delegates do all that they cannot do for themselves.'⁹¹ However, the content of this pamphlet was far too much an internal monologue of French revolutionary thought, and far too little an address to Ottoman readers, to be anything but a publication intended to inform French readers on how to think 'correctly' about the French government.⁹²

The production of regular French news bulletins continued under Descorches's successors. The French government took care to provide Verninac with new types, and two new printing presses, as well as new personnel to operate them.⁹³ Unfortunately, however, the new types were only for Latin and not for Ottoman script. Choiseul-Gouffier's press still possessed Ottoman types, but they were so worn out that they had become useless. Verninac sought to replace them, but he was unsuccessful.⁹⁴ The fact that the bulletin was printed thus from September 1795 onwards makes it doubtful that the newspaper was still reaching an Ottoman audience, since Ottoman-Turkish translations were apparently no longer distributed.⁹⁵

According to Gérard Groc, the contents of Verninac's bulletin were also fundamentally different from Descorches's publication. Here, Groc shares the opinion of a number of historians that Descorches's bulletin was an instrument of 'political pressure'⁹⁶ and insinuates that it had been calling for revolt.⁹⁷ Certainly, the character of the bulletin changed after Descorches left. Nevertheless, I argue that even before the arrival of Verninac, the bulletin had an 'institutional character' and was not a means of 'intrigue'.⁹⁸ Verninac's bulletin was published from September

dans l'administration intérieure de la République. Convention nationale, 5 février 1794', in Auguste Vermorel (ed.), *Oeuvres* (Paris, 1866), 294–307.

⁹⁰ Herbert to Thugut, 24 May 1794, HHStA, Türkei II, 106, April–May, fol. 255.

⁹¹ 'Maximes Républicaines', HHStA, Türkei II, 106, April–May, fol. 258; Robespierre, 'Rapport sur les principes de morale politique qui doivent guider la Convention nationale dans l'administration intérieure de la République', 296. This and the following translation of Robespierre's words are quoted from Richard T. Bienvenu (ed.), *The Ninth of Thermidor: The Fall of Robespierre* (New York, 1970), 32–49.

⁹² We find, for example, in this pamphlet Robespierre's famous dictum on terror and virtue: 'Terror is nothing but prompt, severe, inflexible justice; it is therefore an emanation of virtue.' See 'Maximes Républicaines', HHStA, Türkei II, 106, April–May, fol. 259; Robespierre, 'Rapport sur les principes de morale politique qui doivent guider la Convention nationale dans l'administration intérieure de la République', 301. My interpretation of the pamphlet's purpose differs from that of Gérard Groc, who apparently had not realized that the text was a short version of Robespierre's speech and who considers the Austrian ambassador's testimony more credible than I do. See Groc, 'Propagande révolutionnaire et presse française à Constantinople à la fin du XVIIIe siècle', 801–2.

⁹³ Extract from the registers of the Committee of Public Safety, 3 February 1795, MAE, CP Turquie 190, fol. 156; the Commission of External Relations to the Commission of Transportation, Post, and Couriers, 22 March 1795, MAE, CP Turquie 190, fol. 343.

⁹⁴ Lagarde, 'Note sur les journaux français de Constantinople à l'époque révolutionnaire', 272–3.

⁹⁵ Cf. Hitzel, 'Les Echos de la Révolution française à Istanbul', 148.

⁹⁶ Groc, 'Propagande révolutionnaire et presse française à Constantinople à la fin du XVIIIe siècle', 806.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, 805.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 804.

1795 onwards, as the 'Bulletin de la Légation de la République française près la Porte ottomane' and then restructured and renamed into 'Gazette française de Constantinople', from September 1796.⁹⁹ Because it was printed only in French, it seems that Verninac's bulletin was aimed more exclusively at French citizens, with a view to instructing them about new laws and important events. Furthermore, local events of the Levant now came into focus. The bulletin was still an instrument of propaganda, but the target group had become more homogeneous. The language of the printed newspaper was even more polemic towards the anti-French Coalition, but Verninac seems to have lacked the eloquence, the 'lyrisme', of Descorches.¹⁰⁰ The first experiment of a regular newspaper on Ottoman soil ended during the tenure of Ambassador Aubert-Dubayet, who apparently did not attach much importance to it. In May 1797, half a year after his arrival and shortly after the return to France of Verninac, Aubert-Dubayet 'privatized' publication of the newspaper by handing it over to a Citizen Marion, who published a new journal entitled *Mercure oriental*.¹⁰¹ This last stage of the experiment was, however, very brief. Scarcely two months later, Aubert-Dubayet used a complaint from the Prussian envoy as a pretext for closing the newspaper down.¹⁰²

CONCLUSION

So ended the production of French revolutionary newspapers in Istanbul: at the instigation of a monarchist minister. It was not the Ottomans who ended this experiment, but the French. For four years, the Ottoman government had not taken any serious steps against the French propaganda bulletins, although it had been reported that the Prussian envoy had obtained a proscription as early as 1794.¹⁰³ The Sublime Porte, however, did not react to the 'French menace' even though anti-French ministers repeatedly warned them against any contact with the French revolutionaries. The Austrian ambassador wrote about his futile attempts to discourage the employment of French military instructors:

I have everywhere exhausted my rhetoric to make the Turks realize how dangerous it is to welcome the enemies of all order and subordination; but they only see the advantages of attaching to the service of the Porte people who are instructed in all military branches, while believing these Jacobins unable ever to produce a revolution . . .¹⁰⁴

⁹⁹ Richard Clogg, 'A Further Note on the French Newspapers of Istanbul during the Revolutionary Period (1795–97)', *Belleten*, 39(153–6) (1975), 483–92, 484–5.

¹⁰⁰ Groc, 'Propagande révolutionnaire et presse française à Constantinople à la fin du XVIIIe siècle', 805.

¹⁰¹ Groc and Çağlar, *La Presse française de Turquie de 1795 à nos jours*, 6. On the short-lived *Mercure oriental*, the first private newspaper in the Ottoman Empire, see Gérard Groc, 'Le *Mercure oriental*. Une tentative de presse commerciale ou le premier journal privé de l'Empire ottoman', *Toplum ve Ekonomi*, 7 (1994), 27–48.

¹⁰² Clogg, 'A Further Note on the French Newspapers of Istanbul during the Revolutionary Period (1795–97)', 484–5.

¹⁰³ Herbert to Thugut, 25 June 1794, HHStA, Türkei II, 107, June, fol. 369.

¹⁰⁴ Herbert to Thugut, 24 May 1794, HHStA, Türkei II, 106, April–May, fol. 234.

Compared to the policies towards French revolutionaries in other European states, the liberality of the Ottomans was extraordinary. In Spain, for example, Frenchmen who had been accused of speaking too freely about the Revolution at home were expelled from the country from 1790 onwards.¹⁰⁵ Stanford Shaw described the Ottoman attitude towards the Revolution as 'a curious consequence of self-interest, utter ignorance of European conditions, and pure romance'.¹⁰⁶ I would argue, however, that Shaw simply reproduced the old prejudice of Ottoman ignorance regarding the non-Islamic world and that, unlike the Ottoman government, he completely overestimated the concrete danger of French revolutionary ideology for the Ottoman state.¹⁰⁷ The Sublime Porte did not restrict official French propaganda because there were good reasons to believe that the French were not actively furthering a regime change in the domains of the sultan. Ideological self-containment was an essential part of French revolutionary politics in the Ottoman Empire, as Part III of this study will show.¹⁰⁸

The fact that French revolutionary ideology, especially in the form of nationalism and the concept of popular sovereignty, would in the long run be the ruin of the multi-ethnic and multi-religious Ottoman Empire, leading to its ultimate collapse in the twentieth century, was not as yet foreseeable. Of course, French revolutionary ideology influenced directly a few early nationalists such as Rigas Veleshtinlis,¹⁰⁹ who printed revolutionary pamphlets for the Greek population as early as the mid-1790s. His activity, however, was definitely not the result of a global Jacobin conspiracy. It was the persuasive power, the compelling appeal, of the French ideas that led to their circulation—and not the printing presses of the French embassy in Istanbul. The sweeping effects of the ideas of the French Revolution, however, would only gain real momentum in the course of the nineteenth century, becoming more and more comprehensive. Moreover, the growth of nationalist ideologies did not necessitate the end of the Ottoman Empire. As the examples of China and Japan show, multi-ethnic empires can become nation states and dynasties can become a symbolic point of reference for nationalist identity constructs. Young Ottomans, Young Turks, and Kemalists were all highly influenced by French revolutionary ideology, but only after World War I did the Kemalists part from the empire in favour of a Turkish nation state.¹¹⁰

¹⁰⁵ Godechot, *La Grande Nation*, 99.

¹⁰⁶ Shaw, *Between Old and New*, 247.

¹⁰⁷ Ali Yaycıoğlu even argues that Ottomans were more familiar with France and the French than the French in France were with the Ottomans, as French merchants were part of everyday life of Ottoman trading cities. See Ali Yaycıoğlu, 'Révolutions de Constantinople: France and the Ottoman World in the Age of Revolutions', in Patricia M. E. Lorcin and Todd Shepard (eds.), *French Mediterraneans: Transnational and Imperial Histories* (Lincoln, 2016), 21–51, 25.

¹⁰⁸ This policy was not exclusive to the Ottoman Empire. In Italian states during the Directorate, for example, French diplomatic agents were called to order if they supported local patriots too actively. See Virginie Martin, 'Du modèle à la pratique ou des pratiques aux modèles. La diplomatie républicaine du Directoire', in Pierre Serna (ed.), *Républiques sœurs. Le Directoire et la révolution atlantique* (Rennes, 2009), 87–100, 97.

¹⁰⁹ Clogg, 'The "Dhidhaskalia Patriki" (1798)', 90; Vinogradov, 'Quelques considérations sur l'impact de la Révolution française dans les Balkans', 30.

¹¹⁰ On the Young Ottomans, Young Turks, and Kemalists, see Erik J. Zürcher, *Young Turk Legacy and Nation Building: From the Ottoman Empire to Atatürk's Turkey* (London, 2010), especially pp. 213–35. See also Bilici, 'La Révolution française dans l'historiographie turque (1789–1927)'.

But let us return to the late eighteenth century. From the beginning of the French Revolution, there was no way to stop the circulation of its ideology; the Ottoman Empire was far too well connected. The French revolutionary government, however, did nothing to facilitate the emergence of a revolutionary movement in the Ottoman Empire, since it was interested in a stable Ottoman government that would be instantly ready to enter the war on the French side.¹¹¹ French propaganda emerged out of necessity: the French communities in the Levant were hopelessly divided into different factions. Propaganda was one of the means to create a new sense of unity. Furthermore, the French republican government wanted to persuade the Sublime Porte to enter an alliance, but it had no means of affording suitable presents, it did not give the impression of being a stable and reliable partner, and it was denounced by the representatives of all other European states as a terrible, yet temporary, accident. In order to rectify this situation, the French envoy Descorches used his propaganda bulletin as a multi-purpose tool. With this bulletin, Descorches had something to offer to the Ottomans, namely political news from Europe at a time when such information became much sought after. This news, in turn, helped to shed a more favourable light on the situation of France. The supposed 'seditiousness' of the French bulletins is probably just as much the product of anti-French propaganda as the notion that Wahhabis have anything in common with Jacobinism.

¹¹¹ This is certainly true for the time before the Peace of Campoformio (1797). It is possible, however, that French propaganda, especially among the Christian populations of the Balkans, changed following the French occupation of the Ionian Islands, which was a result of the Campoformio treaty. Furthermore, it is possible that Bonaparte's Balkan policy differed from the Directory's general policy towards the Ottoman Empire. Cf. Arš [Arch], 'L'Influence de la Révolution française dans les Balkans', 37–9.

PART III

REGIME CHANGE IN THE FRENCH COMMUNITIES OF THE LEVANT, 1792–1795

Forgotten by Liberty?

Regime Change and the Challenges to Consular Authority in the Levant

On 15 August 1793, the newly constructed Théâtre national, on the Rue de la Loi (formerly Rue de Richelieu) in Paris, opened its doors with a patriotic play entitled *La Constitution à Constantinople*.¹ It was not the first play that evening, but the preceding piece, a comedy entitled *Adèle et Paulin*, had not been to the liking of the audience. The first act was repeatedly interrupted by booing and the performance of the second act was completely disrupted by the disorderly behaviour of the audience who occupied the stalls, where people began shouting the ‘Marseillaise’. A manager of the theatre came on stage to calm down the audience: ‘Citizens, should we continue to play *Adèle et Paulin* or do you want us to play the *Constitution*?’² The spectators opted for skipping to the next play right away. The *Constitution*, it seems, was more to their taste. The background story of this comedy revolved around a French revolutionary festival in Istanbul, celebrating the adoption of the Constitution of 1793. The main plot was a love story, in which a Turkish girl lost her heart to a brave Frenchman, who in the end triumphed over his lying and bragging Spanish rival. The play began with a scene in which the French consul asked the philosophically-minded local Istanbulite Ahmed, one of the main characters, if he could use his garden for the festivity. The performance ended with a grandiose divertissement,³ representing the planting of a liberty tree in Istanbul, which included a spectacular parade of ‘citizens, children, young girls, old people and musicians, national guards, cannoneers, infantrymen, a chariot drawn by four superb horses, carrying an *ark of liberty*’.⁴ All these filed through the scene, carrying revolutionary banners and emblems, and in between them ‘a numerous group of pretty good dancers’.⁵

¹ The theatre had the largest auditorium in all Paris, with room for 2,300 spectators. It later became home to the Paris Opera, until it was demolished in 1823. It was situated on the site of today’s Square Louvois, opposite the old building of the Bibliothèque nationale de France. See *The History of Paris: From the Earliest Period to the Present Day* . . . , 3 vols. (London, 1827), vol. 2, 474–8.

² ‘Spectacles. Paris, Journal des Spectacles’, *L’Esprit des journaux*, 22(9) (1793), 297–339, 336.

³ A divertissement is a dance performance, which in seventeenth- and eighteenth-century French theatre and opera was often placed at the end of the piece, or in between two acts.

⁴ ‘Spectacles’, 338. Emphasis in original.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 339.

This comedy, staged in one of the major theatres of Paris, reveals several phenomena that are of interest in this study. First of all, it illustrates the connect-edness of revolutionary processes, and the perception of them, in both France and the French communities of the Levant. French expatriates in the Ottoman Empire and their compatriots in metropolitan France shared the same discursive universe. The French in the Ottoman Empire attentively followed the radical changes in France and felt deeply affected by the distant events of the Revolution. Like their compatriots in France—albeit in different ways—they experienced and lived through the hardships of war, the patriotic enthusiasm caused by civic empowerment, the treason of high-ranking officials, the schisms among the supporters of the Revolution, and the emigration of those who could not accept the new order. Metropolitan France, in its turn, was not ignorant of the fate of those few hundred people who constituted the French communities in the Ottoman Empire. The background story of *La Constitution à Constantinople* reveals this: it was inspired by an actual civic festival, which took place in Istanbul on 20 January 1793 (see Chapter 9). The highlight of this celebration was indeed the inauguration of a tree of liberty on the French embassy's terrace—allegedly in view of the sultan's palace on the other side of the Golden Horn (see Figure 7.1). This event received great attention in the French press, and it was also referred to when Franco-Ottoman diplomacy was debated by the Paris Jacobins (see Chapter 4). Civic festivals were a



Figure 7.1 Contemporary engraving, depicting one of the French embassy's terraces. In the background, from left to right, Topkapı Palace, Hagia Sophia, and Sultan Ahmet (or Blue) Mosque. Digitally edited image (book curvature removal). Jean-Baptiste Hilaire, 'Vue de Constantinople prise des Jardins du Palais de France', in Marie-Gabriel-Auguste-Florent Choiseul-Gouffier, *Voyage pittoresque de la Grèce* (Paris, 1822), vol. 2.2, 481c. Bibliothèque nationale de France.

central element of French revolutionary political culture. They are an illustration of the ways in which French expatriates in the Levant could participate in the advent of this new political culture, to a much greater degree than most French expatriates elsewhere.

Nevertheless, the most recent and most comprehensive study on the French expatriate communities in the Levant, Amaury Faivre d'Arcier's *Les Oubliés de la liberté*, comes to the conclusion that '[p]aradoxically, the Revolution did not cause as much change as one would suppose . . .'⁶ 'Far from constituting a rupture, the Revolution manifested itself by some administrative reforms and an adaptation of the old apparatus to the new institutional norms.'⁷ Faivre d'Arcier, who based his assessment largely on the legal conditions of the French expatriate communities in the Ottoman Empire, argues that the greatest changes in the daily routine of the French communities in the Levant resulted more from the war, and the subsequent collapse of French trade in the Eastern Mediterranean, than from the regime change at home.⁸

In Part III of this study, I will challenge this assessment and the notion that the French residents of the Levant had been 'forgotten by liberty'. In doing so, I will not negate the results of Faivre d'Arcier's study outright.⁹ However, I will put a much stronger emphasis on the emergence of a French revolutionary culture, as well as the translocal connections of the regime change, in the French expatriate communities. This chapter first explores the changes in the legal framework of the autonomous French communities in the Ottoman Empire. Then it focuses on the changes in the administration of the expatriate communities, and the difficulties encountered in this process. As in France, the regime change in the Levant led to a destabilization of the French state's authority over its citizens. Consequently, the regime change will be analysed here with regard to the resulting frictions *within* the French communities, as well as the tensions between them and other communities in the Levant. Then I investigate the political strategies of the French authorities for stabilizing the new regime in the expatriate communities (Chapter 8), before examining in more detail the cultural aspects of regime change (Chapter 9).

⁶ Faivre d'Arcier, *Les Oubliés de la liberté*, 10.

⁷ Ibid., 7.

⁸ Ibid., 11.

⁹ Faivre d'Arcier's book is a concise description of the living conditions within the French communities during the late eighteenth-century Ottoman Empire. It is my impression that a number of the volume's assumptions about the Ottoman Empire itself might be quite inaccurate; however, not being an Ottomanist myself, I leave it to others to criticize this aspect of the study in detail. To give just one example, Faivre d'Arcier is of the opinion that the application of Ottoman law ('la loi locale d'essence religieuse et réservé aux seuls "croyants"') to European residents would have rendered commercial relations with them impossible. Ottoman *şariat* law was clearly not 'reserved to Muslims'. In fact, non-Muslim Ottoman subjects often turned to *şariat* courts if they deemed their chances of successful litigation higher there, as a recent study by Christian Roth shows. Moreover, the capitulations may have been beneficial to European commerce in the Levant, but they can hardly be considered a *sine qua non* for it. See *ibid.*, 19; Christian Roth, 'Aspects of Juridical Integration of Non-Muslims in the Ottoman Empire: Observations in the Eighteenth-Century Urban and Rural Aegean', in Pascal Firges et al. (eds.), *Well-Connected Domains: Towards an Entangled Ottoman History* (Leiden, 2014), 150–63.

THE LEGAL FRAMEWORK OF THE FRENCH
EXPATRIATE COMMUNITIES: THE CAPITULATIONS
AND THE ROYAL ORDINANCE OF 1781

When reviewing the play *La Constitution à Constantinople*, the critic of the *Journal des Spectacles* commented that the plot was more or less random, and that it did not have much to do with the background story: 'by changing the costumes of four actors, the play could become *La Constitution à Londres, à Amsterdam, à Madrid, à Venise, à Rome, or à Vienne*—just as it was here *La Constitution à Constantinople*'.¹⁰ This criticism was not wholly justified, for while the plot of the play may have been arbitrary, its setting was not: there were only a few cities in Europe where French republicans could openly celebrate their new regime.¹¹

Why was this possible in the Ottoman Empire? French residents in the Levant, like the subjects of other European states, had been granted special privileges by the Ottoman sultans, which European sources referred to as 'capitulations' (from Latin, *capitulum*—chapter). The Ottomans referred to them as *ahidname* (pledge or covenant) or *ahidname-i hümayun* (imperial pledge). The capitulations had developed out of Islamic legal traditions of safe conduct for non-Muslim foreigners (*aman*). While the *aman* was only temporary, the *ahidname* was by default permanent (at least during the reign of the issuing sultan), and applied to all subjects of a foreign sovereign to whom the sultan had granted them.¹² Capitulations had been accorded to the French kings from 1569 onwards.¹³ Until 1740, these privileges had to be confirmed by every new sultan for the duration of his reign. The capitulations of 1740, given by Mahmut I to Louis XV, declared that the privileges given to the French were permanent.¹⁴ According to the capitulations, the Ottoman sultan guaranteed the personal safety, as well as the property, of French residents in the Ottoman Empire. Furthermore, the French expatriate communities enjoyed exemption from a number of taxes, the most symbolically significant being the poll tax for non-Muslims (*cizye*).¹⁵ Most important in the

¹⁰ 'Spectacles', 338.

¹¹ It should be mentioned, however, that most of the revolutionary festivals in Istanbul avoided great publicity outside the French community (see Chapter 9). For other examples of revolutionary celebrations in Copenhagen and Genoa respectively, illustrating the difficulties which the organizers of such events encountered in other neutral states, see Rémusat, 'Un sans-culotte à la cour de Danemark', 556–60; Martin, 'La Diplomatie en Révolution', vol. 2, 626–9.

¹² Eldem, 'Capitulations and Western Trade', 293.

¹³ There was an earlier treaty project in 1536, between Süleyman the Magnificent and Francis I, which included similar privileges for the French, but it was never ratified. See Viorel Panaite, 'French Capitulations and Consular Jurisdiction in Egypt and Aleppo in the Late Sixteenth and Early Seventeenth Centuries', in Pascal Firges et al. (eds.), *Well-Connected Domains: Towards an Entangled Ottoman History* (Leiden, 2014), 71–87, 72.

¹⁴ The capitulations indeed remained in force, and became a tool of informal imperialism, until revoked in 1914. See Eldem, 'Capitulations and Western Trade', 320. For the text of the capitulations of 1740, see Ignace de Testa (ed.), *Recueil des traités de la Porte ottomane. Avec les puissances étrangères . . .*, 11 vols. (Paris, 1864), vol. 1, 186–210.

¹⁵ Maurits H. van den Boogert, *The Capitulations and the Ottoman Legal System: Qadis, Consuls and Berathis in the 18th Century* (Leiden, 2005), 33.

present context, however, was the fact that the capitulations granted the French the right to police their communities autonomously and to live according to their own laws. This gave the representatives of the French state a twofold function as diplomats and as governors of their community:

Our legation at Constantinople is very different from our other missions; none can be compared to it. The person who fulfils this post unites the double functions of being a political agent and an administrator, representing the Republic to the [Ottoman] government and representing it also as head of the French residents in the Levant. In this capacity, he even has a personal jurisdiction over the application of our own laws . . . ¹⁶

In practice, French ambassadors and consuls were responsible for keeping good order in their communities. The Ottoman state interfered only if public peace was in danger. Furthermore, litigation between Frenchmen was decided by a consular court.¹⁷ French authorities had the right to seize their subjects by force and to send them home to have them tried there. If a French subject had a legal dispute with an Ottoman subject, both were obliged to appear before an Ottoman court, to be judged according to Ottoman law. In such a case, the French person had the guaranteed right to legal assistance from a French dragoman.¹⁸

The Ottoman capitulations had granted to the French a certain degree of autonomy to organize their communities themselves. It was this legal autonomy, the limits of which often had to be negotiated with the Ottoman government on a case-by-case basis,¹⁹ which turned the French expatriate communities in the Levant into a theatre of the French Revolution. Elsewhere, outside France and its colonies, French citizens had to follow the laws of the country. Only in the Ottoman context were they living according to French laws and regulations. Consequently, when the law was contested in France, it was also contested in the expatriate communities of the Levant.

While the capitulations constituted the external legal framework for the French communities, as a part of the *jus inter gentes*,²⁰ the internal structures were regulated by a royal ordinance, decreed in 1781.²¹ This ordinance was the result of a reform and rationalization effort of the French monarchy, which, after a number of inquiries into the matter, reorganized various old laws and decrees into one new basic regulation.²² However, the ordinance of 1781, though a reforming measure,

¹⁶ Report on the state of the French legation, 8 August 1793, MAE, CP Turquie 185, fol. 160.

¹⁷ Also, litigation between foreign subjects of different nationality was only brought before the Ottoman authorities if the respective consuls or ambassadors agreed to do so. See van den Boogert, *The Capitulations and the Ottoman Legal System*, 36.

¹⁸ Faivre d'Arcier, *Les Oubliés de la liberté*, 17–19.

¹⁹ Panaite, 'French Capitulations and Consular Jurisdiction in Egypt and Aleppo in the Late Sixteenth and Early Seventeenth Centuries', 82.

²⁰ *Jus inter gentes* literally means 'law between the peoples'. In this context, it signifies the legal agreements between sovereigns (here: the Ottoman sultan and the French king).

²¹ Similar legislation also existed for the other European communities in the Levant. See van den Boogert, *The Capitulations and the Ottoman Legal System*, 38–42.

²² *Ordonnance du roi, du 3 Mars 1781. Concernant les consulats, la résidence, le commerce et la navigation des sujets du roi dans les Échelles du Levant et de Barbarie* (Paris, 1781), 2. On earlier regulations, see Coller, 'East of Enlightenment', 453–60.

was in many regards utterly incompatible with the spirit and the principles of the legal reforms enacted after 1789. To give but a few examples: the ordinance forbade any French subject to take up residence in the Levant without permission in advance.²³ Marriages with local women were not allowed without official consent. After marriage, these women were obliged to dress themselves 'à la française, on pain of being sent to France'.²⁴ Furthermore, French subjects were not allowed to assemble without official permission, they were forbidden to gamble,²⁵ and the heads of trading houses were officially required to attend the Catholic mass on high holidays, together with the local consul or ambassador.²⁶

The ordinance of 1781 remained largely unchallenged, until the defection of ambassador Choiseul-Gouffier in 1792. However, during the diplomatic 'interregnum' between Choiseul-Gouffier's departure and Descorches's arrival, the French residents in Istanbul and elsewhere brought about modifications in the administrative practices of the consular authorities, which deviated from the 1781 ordinance. The most important change was certainly the extension of political participation in the communities. Under the old regime, every French community was represented by a local, guild-like, privileged merchant corporation, the so-called *nation*.²⁷ The *nation* consisted of the heads of the local merchant firms. Assemblies of the *nation* deliberated on important issues of the community and elected one or two (depending on the number of merchant firms in the community) representatives, the so-called 'deputies of the *nation*' (*député de la nation*). In Istanbul, the *nation* consisted of thirteen merchants who elected two deputies.²⁸ In practice, however, the definition of who belonged to the *nation* became ambiguous after the deposition of the last *ancien régime* ambassador. The minutes of the general assembly of 8 December 1792, for example, refer explicitly to 'the whole French nation at Constantinople', explaining that this meant all French residents of the Ottoman capital, the ordinance of 1781 notwithstanding (see also Chapter 1).²⁹

The non-observance of the royal ordinance was not limited to this point alone. The strict constraint on mobility and other regulations were also no longer enforced.³⁰ Nevertheless, there had to be some regulations for the French communities, and the ordinance of 1781 was, up to then, the sole basis for the authority of all French government officials. On 21 September 1792, just before abolishing the monarchy, the National Convention had explicitly decreed that all old laws and regulations remained in force, until abolished or replaced by new ones.³¹ But who

²³ *Ordonnance du roi, du 3 Mars 1781*, 36.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 43.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 45.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 34.

²⁷ This arrangement was partly an emulation of Ottoman trade structures, which were largely controlled by guilds. French merchants had established the merchant corporations in the first half of the eighteenth century, in order not to be played off against each other by the powerful Ottoman guilds that controlled the buyers' market. See Eldem, 'Istanbul', 183.

²⁸ *Ordonnance du roi, du 3 Mars 1781*, 47–51.

²⁹ Minutes of the general assembly of the French *nation* in Istanbul, 8 December 1792, MAE, CP Turquie 184, fol. 64.

³⁰ Report of Descorches, 9 August 1793, MAE, CP Turquie 185, fol. 204.

³¹ Charles Antoine Lepec (ed.), *Recueil général des lois, décrets, ordonnances, etc. Depuis le mois de juin 1789 jusqu'au mois d'août 1830*, 20 vols. (Paris, 1839), vol. 4, 1.

had the authority to decide which rules were still valid and which were not? These were pressing issues which confronted the first republican envoy, Descorches, at the time of his arrival. The French government had assigned to him more than a diplomatic mission. It also appointed him as 'commissaire civil' for the Levant, a title often bestowed on colonial administrators. In this function, he addressed his government, in early August 1793, with a report on the state of the French communities in the Levant:

The regulator of the Levant, the law [organizing] everything here, was heretofore the ordinance of 1781 and its supplementary instructions; [...] [However,] it is difficult for free men to find in it today a guide for their conduct [...] [But without any regulations, the] officials lack a compass and find themselves [...] devoid of the powers necessary to exercise their functions. *Should the ordinance of 1781 continue to direct the entire Levant in all matters that the laws of the Republic have not formally destroyed?* This is the first question, the unresolvedness of which leaves the officials without direction and the ills without remedy. Whenever there is a disorder, an individual abuse in the Levant, which an official wants to put a stop to, he will rely on the ordinance, because he cannot refer to any other law; he only has a decree to provisionally maintain all previous laws that have not been formally abrogated. The man of disorder or abuse will respond with far more respectable credentials, [such as] the Rights of Man and all the sacred laws that ensure our civil and political liberty; [and he will argue] that the principles of the ordinance are in opposition to all these laws. What is, he will not fail to add, a building that has no foundation? . . . and from then on, without any doubt, the official will not dare anything and the other one will dare everything [...]³²

Such a state of things was extremely dangerous, added Descorches, especially in the Ottoman Empire, where often a whole community was punished for the misdeeds of individuals. The solution Descorches proposed, to overcome this state of legal uncertainty, was to have the National Convention in Paris decree explicitly that the ordinance of 1781 still had to be executed provisionally—modified, however, in all articles which were incompatible with the laws of the Republic. To determine the way in which the ordinance was henceforth to be modified and applied in the French communities, Descorches suggested the establishment of an administrative board (*bureau d'administration*) in Istanbul, consisting of the French envoy, the two deputies of the *nation*, and three deputies chosen in a general assembly.³³ Likewise, the other French communities should establish similar boards for the application of the ordinance of 1781. Furthermore, all administrative boards were intended to be responsible for both police and jurisdiction in their respective communities—competences which hitherto had been reserved to the French envoys or consuls.³⁴

Certainly, the most pressing questions were those relating to the political rights of French citizens in the Levant. Were all male French adults allowed to participate in general assemblies; or only those who were residents in the Levant (excluding

³² Report of Descorches, 9 August 1793, MAE, CP Turquie 185, fols. 202–3. Emphasis and unbracketed ellipses are in the original.

³³ Ibid., fol. 203.

³⁴ Ibid., fol. 204.

ship crews and travellers); or maybe only those who had an interest in the commerce there (excluding everyone except the members of the old regime *nation*):³⁵ What was the political status of expatriates, with regard to the French Republic? 'Do the French living outside of the Republic keep their political rights, which they can [consequently] exercise wherever they are?'³⁶ Were, for example, the general assemblies of the French communities also to be considered as primary assemblies (*assemblée primaire*), that is, as the smallest unit through which French citizens exercised their sovereignty?³⁷

Unfortunately, his government did not send Descorches any clear answers to his questions. The laconic reply of the foreign minister was that the government approved of the measures Descorches had taken to maintain harmony among the French citizens in Istanbul.³⁸ It is possible that the employees of the foreign ministry were not familiar with problems concerning the internal government of the *échelles*, as the French communities were called. During the old regime, the consular network and the administration of the *échelles* were in the domain of the navy ministry, and were attached to the foreign ministry only on 14 February 1793.³⁹ In any case, Descorches received no decision on the establishment of an administrative board, no information on the political rights of French citizens in the Levant, and no instructions concerning the application of the ordinance of 1781. It was probably from the newspapers that Descorches learned about Robespierre's negative attitude towards the convocation of primary assemblies: 'Who would believe that . . . primary assemblies have been held at Constantinople! It is plain to see that such a transaction could be neither useful to our cause, nor to our principles . . .'⁴⁰

An internal government report of November 1793 (three months after Descorches's report) came to the following conclusion regarding the reformation of the ordinance of 1781: 'Without any doubt it is necessary to let this moment of crisis pass, before dealing with such an important work.'⁴¹ One month later, the Committee of Public Safety decreed that the French envoy should finally establish a reform commission, to modify the royal ordinance 'in everything that is against the letter and the spirit of the new laws of the French Republic, taking into consideration the local circumstances'. The suggestions of the reform commission should then be sent to the Committee of Public Safety, to be approved or rectified

³⁵ Ibid., fol. 205.

³⁶ Ibid., fol. 204.

³⁷ According to the never-implemented Constitution of 1793, primary assemblies, consisting of 200–600 citizens, had the purpose of carrying out all elections (or the choice of electors) and referenda. See Articles 2, 12, 19, 23, 37, 115 of the Constitution of 1793: Dieter Gosewinkel and Johannes Masing (eds.), *Die Verfassungen in Europa, 1789–1949. Wissenschaftliche Textedition* (Munich, 2006), 193–205. In the Constitution of 1791, primary assemblies already served as the basis for the electoral process.

³⁸ Foreign Minister to Descorches, 7 October 1793, MAE, CP Turquie 186, fol. 74.

³⁹ Degros, 'La Révolution', 287.

⁴⁰ Robespierre at the National Convention, 17 November 1793, *Archives parlementaires*, vol. 79, 380.

⁴¹ 'Rapport sur les agents employés dans le Levant', 25 November 1793, MAE, CP Turquie 186, fol. 352.

by the National Convention.⁴² However, this decree, like most other government projects regarding the re-establishment of order in the Levant, was eventually revoked and no commission was ever set up.⁴³

About a year passed before Descorches received some instructions on how to find a balance between the enforcement of an obsolete ordinance and the prevention of a state of lawlessness. Meanwhile, the government had not forgotten about the French envoy's initial inquiries of August 1793, as an internal report of May 1794, summarizing Descorches's queries, proves.⁴⁴ Although there had been a consensus in the French government on the continued enforcement of the ordinance of 1781, Descorches received no explicit statement from his superiors until July 1794. It was only after the victory of Fleurus (see Chapter 4), that the commissaire of external relations, Buchot, sent some instructions. The commissaire's main argument for the perpetuation of the ordinance of 1781 was that some of its regulations were based on the Ottoman capitulations, and therefore could not be changed without first renegotiating them with the Sublime Porte:

The ordinances and statutes, according to which our concerns have been settled up to now in the lands under Ottoman domination, do undoubtedly suffer the effects of the absurd and tyrannical regime under which they had been drawn up. But they are based on treaties which the Republic has not yet changed. From this results a first principle, namely that until the treaties are modified, all the provisions which are based on them will have to be executed.⁴⁵

Buchot also took a conservative stance towards those regulations of the royal ordinance that could be modified without violating the capitulations. No expatriate community (*échelle*) could consider itself exempt from the ordinance or modify the rules alone. Adjustments of the ordinance were only possible, if the representative of the government gave his consent. The emphasis here was clearly put on the reinvigoration of government authority:

As for the [rules] that would admit modifications without violating the treaties, it cannot depend on any individual, nor even any particular community [*échelle*], to change them on their own initiative or to believe themselves exempted from their observance. Only in the case where the provisions would be directly contrary to our republican principles or to the positive laws which are by their nature applicable to the French abroad and in the *échelles* of the Levant, only in this case could the French [residents] agree with the representative of the Republic on provisional changes to be made; and [such changes] could only be concerning their internal organization and by no means anything that would touch the domain of [foreign] policy and of the government.⁴⁶

⁴² 'Extrait des registres du Comité de salut public', 16 December 1793, MAE, CP Turquie 186, fol. 426. The decree was not included in Aulard's collection of 'Acts by the *Committee of Public Safety*'.

⁴³ On the government projects for the re-establishment of order in the French communities, see Chapter 8.

⁴⁴ Commission of External Relations's list of Descorches's demands, around May 1794, MAE, CP Turquie 187, fol. 107.

⁴⁵ Commissaire of External Relations to Descorches, 5 July 1794, MAE, CP Turquie 188, fols. 250–1.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, fol. 251.

CITIZEN HÉNIN AND THE ISTANBUL JACOBIN CLUB

Buchot's explicit rejection of any meddling by French residents in the Levant in the affairs of the French government was a reaction to the attempts of local citizens and political clubs to interfere in the diplomatic activities of the French envoy and those of the consuls. Descorches's opponent, Étienne-Félix Hénin, for example, had proposed controlling the French envoy in Istanbul by a local 'embassy council' and thus to 'balance the authority of a diplomatic agent which is too absolute'.⁴⁷ Also, Descorches continuously had to quarrel with a group of radical French revolutionaries who repeatedly accused him of being a traitor and a disguised monarchist.

The leader of this faction in Istanbul, Hénin, had been sent to the Ottoman capital by the French government in order to replace Descorches as chargé d'affaires, in case the envoy failed to reach the Ottoman capital.⁴⁸ On his arrival, Hénin found Descorches already installed. The main purpose for his appointment being obsolete, Hénin decided to monitor the activities of the French envoy. Only two days after his arrival, Hénin complained to the foreign minister that Descorches was not cooperating with him in preparing for the arrival of Ambassador Sémonville.⁴⁹ Descorches wrote to the foreign minister the same day, announcing Hénin's arrival as that of an esteemed man.⁵⁰ Five days after his arrival, Hénin was already alleging that Descorches was anxious not to be replaced by Sémonville: 'He has contributed a lot to the restoration of patriotism in Constantinople . . . [But] he seems to be unhappy with the idea that he will have to cede the mission at Constantinople to somebody else and he completely refused to support my efforts . . .'⁵¹ Moreover, Hénin criticized the fact that Descorches did not live in the French embassy.⁵² Shortly afterwards, the chargé d'affaires interfered for the first time in Descorches's area of responsibility, trying, in association with like-minded citizens, to pressure him to demand an edict from the Sublime Porte in favour of the official reception of Sémonville.⁵³ The French envoy was, naturally, irritated that a few Frenchmen without any official legitimacy wanted to meddle in his diplomatic transactions. He complained about Hénin: 'I was quite vexed, especially with [Hénin], because I could not see how it would be a wise political measure to call together seven to eight persons, whom he had more or less just met, to an assembly on diplomatic

⁴⁷ Hénin to Foreign Minister, 12 April 1794, MAE, CP Turquie 187, fol. 366.

⁴⁸ Before arriving in Istanbul, Hénin had been chargé d'affaires in Venice, where he achieved official recognition for the French Republic. On 6 May 1793, Foreign Minister Lebrun charged him to go to Istanbul, in order to prepare for the arrival of Descorches and Sémonville. He left Venice on 17 June 1793 and arrived in Istanbul on 23 July 1793. See Berthier, 'Istanbul sous la cocarde révolutionnaire en l'an II', 99; Hitzel, 'Étienne-Félix Hénin, un jacobin à Constantinople', 35.

⁴⁹ Hénin to Foreign Minister, 25 July 1793, MAE, CP Turquie 185, fol. 88.

⁵⁰ Descorches to Foreign Minister, 25 July 1793, MAE, CP Turquie 185, fol. 90.

⁵¹ Hénin to Foreign Minister, 28 July 1793, MAE, CP Turquie 185, fol. 97.

⁵² Étienne-Félix Hénin, *Sommaire de la correspondance d'Étienne-Félix Hénin, chargé d'affaires de la République française à Constantinople, pendant les 1re, 2de et 3e années de la République* (Paris, 1795), 7. As explained in Chapter 1, by not taking up residence in the embassy palace, Descorches was complying with an Ottoman demand.

⁵³ Report by French citizens, 1 August 1793, MAE, CP Turquie 185, fols. 103–4.

matters . . .⁵⁴ Moreover, Descorches considered it unnecessary to demand an edict for the French ambassador, because the Ottoman government would receive Sémonville in any event. In his view, such an initiative would only disturb the ongoing alliance negotiations with the Sublime Porte.

Since the envoy refused to accommodate Hénin's demands, the chargé insisted that Descorches should inform the Ottoman government about Hénin's mission to prepare the arrival of Ambassador Sémonville. Descorches refused to do so, because he had also been instructed to prepare the way for Sémonville. What impression would it make on their Ottoman interlocutors if they now had to deal with two French agents? Would they not think that the French government was so disorganized that it could not even decide which representative to send to Istanbul? However, if Descorches's refusal had any effect, it changed things for the worse. Hénin took Descorches's attitude as an incentive to act independently from him and to contact the Ottoman government at his own initiative. He got in touch with Prince Moruzi, the dragoman of the Sublime Porte. As could have been foreseen, this meeting was not fruitful at all; it only harmed the reputation of the French.⁵⁵ How could he find a plausible explanation for the fact that two representatives of the Republic were negotiating independently from one another, without leaving an impression that the new government in France was utterly unstable and in no way a reliable partner? Descorches even assumed that Hénin had been accusing him, in the presence of the Porte's dragoman, of being not a patriot, but an aristocrat.⁵⁶

Hénin not only interfered in Descorches's diplomatic activities, but also soon began to form an opposition against his internal policies in the French expatriate communities. It is very telling to see how Hénin and Descorches judged the progress of the revolutionary spirit among their fellow citizens in the Ottoman capital. Both reported on this issue at the beginning of August 1793. The French envoy was responsible for the republicanization of, and the re-establishment of harmony among, the Frenchmen in the Levant. He therefore tried to give an overall positive picture, excusing reactionary sentiments as bad old habits:

The general spirit is good: these are French of all shades; some of them are retaining the tint of their old habits. From this result some cases of alienation, some individual bitterness, which I am trying to smooth in order to keep us as united as possible. Unity, which is so valuable everywhere, is vitally important under a government like the Turkish one, whose movements are sudden, violent, and fanatical, and where consequently any kind of agitation and disorder, even from individuals, can ruin everything. My work has already achieved some success: some rapprochements have taken place and I have reason to believe that we will live in peace and republican unity.⁵⁷

Hénin, on the other hand, having an interest in accusing Descorches of mismanagement, saw nothing of the approaching state of 'peace and republican unity': 'I was not at all satisfied with the state in which I found the *échelle* of Constantinople;

⁵⁴ Descorches to Foreign Minister, 8 August 1793, MAE, CP Turquie 185, fol. 135.

⁵⁵ Hénin to Foreign Minister, 1 September 1793, MAE, CP Turquie 185, fol. 269.

⁵⁶ Descorches to Foreign Minister, 10 February 1794, MAE, CP Turquie 187, fol. 63.

⁵⁷ Report of Descorches, 9 August 1793, MAE, CP Turquie 185, fols. 201–1.

and, with the exception of the small number of true patriots whom I joined, all the French who reside here are more or less tainted with the aristocratic leprosy . . .'⁵⁸

The schism between Hénin and his self-declared 'true patriots' on one side and Descorches, his partisans, and the rather conservative merchants on the other became fully apparent at the celebrations of the first anniversary of the fall of the monarchy, on 10 August 1793. Shortly before, the Ottoman *reis efendi* had explicitly proscribed a celebration on the premises of the French embassy. The envoy and the majority of the residents respected this prohibition. But Hénin and his partisans ignored the ruling and even resisted the orders of the French dragoman, which led to great tensions among the members of the French community.⁵⁹ Descorches, it seems, underestimated the consequences of this division, which would affect his mission greatly for its entire duration:

The moderation and mildness in the conduct of the vast majority of the French who live here have fortunately forestalled the consequences of this division; [the incident] has unmasked some intriguers . . . and from this point of view it will prove to be useful. I was however quite vexed at the fact that I cannot refrain from considering Citizen Hénin to be the main instigator of [this confrontation].⁶⁰

The same day, 10 August 1793, the self-declared true patriots of the Ottoman capital decided to found a political club after the model of the Jacobin clubs in France. The varying names of this club emulated French examples: sometimes it figured as the 'Republican Society of the Friends of Liberty and Equality Residing at Constantinople', sometimes simply as the 'Republican Club', or as the 'Popular Society of Constantinople'.⁶¹ Similar societies also existed in Izmir and Aleppo,⁶² the one in Aleppo being the oldest and most long-lived.⁶³ The Club of Constantinople was founded by seventeen Frenchmen and it never had more than twenty members.⁶⁴ Of these twenty, the largest group, at least nine members, were directly

⁵⁸ Hénin to Foreign Minister, 8 August 1793, MAE, CP Turquie 185, fol. 122.

⁵⁹ Report on the celebration of 10 August 1793, MAE, CP Turquie 185, fols. 227–32. See also Chapter 9.

⁶⁰ Descorches to Foreign Minister, 25 August 1793, MAE, CP Turquie 185, fol. 262.

⁶¹ MAE, CP Turquie 185, fol. 359; MAE, CP Turquie 186, fols. 396, 434.

⁶² Henin to Foreign Minister, 16 August 1793, MAE, CP Turquie 185, fol. 146.

⁶³ The Club of Aleppo was somewhat different from the other two clubs in the Levant. It had been founded earlier, on 8 March 1791. In February 1795 (around the time that the club, like all popular societies in France, was dissolved by law), the Club of Aleppo consisted of nine members: eight were merchants or merchant's assistants, and one was a surgeon. The average age of the members was 40, the youngest being 22, the oldest 64. See Membership list of the Club of Aleppo, 20 February 1795, MAE, CP Turquie 190, fol. 237.

⁶⁴ Hénin, *Sommaire de la correspondance d'Étienne-Félix Hénin, chargé d'affaires de la République française à Constantinople, pendant les 1re, 2de et 3e années de la République*, 12. I found one membership list which also mentioned the members' professions: 1. Hénin, chargé d'affaires; 2. Bruguière, naturalist; 3. Olivier, naturalist; 4. Sicard, assistant at the department of foreign affairs; 5. Florenville, merchant; 6. Noyane, merchant in Izmir; 7. Dizerand, printer; 8. Amic, attached to Olivier (his brother-in-law); 9. Péllissier, jeweller; 10. Pailharez, 'master of language' (employed as copyist at the French chancellery); 11. Chénicé, jeweller; 12. Commene, assistant of the French consul in Baghdad; 13. Renaud, assistant of Florenville; 14. Bertrand, jeweller; 15. Jannin, jeweller; 16. Lison, diamond cutter; 17. Mazeret, surgeon; 18. Venel, ship captain; 19. Luzin, French agent at Rodosto;

or indirectly on the payroll of the French government;⁶⁵ only four of them were involved in the Levant trade,⁶⁶ while five were craftsmen (all jewellers).⁶⁷ Furthermore, more than half of the members had either arrived lately in Istanbul or would leave the city within two years.⁶⁸ The composition of the club fits well into the findings of Lynn Hunt, regarding the role of 'outsiders' as agents of the Revolution in France: 'With its emphasis on equality of citizenship, universalistic values, and the destruction of regional and local privileges, the new political culture appealed to the newly arrived, gave them a sense of belonging to one nation, and in turn depended on them for its further propagation.'⁶⁹ It is quite possible that similar patterns existed in the Levant, too.

In a report sent to the foreign ministry in early September 1793, the members of the Club of Constantinople described the purpose of their society as being 'at this *échelle* the invigilator of ambassadors, the faithful correspondent of the friends of liberty [i.e. other Jacobin societies], and especially the defender of the true principles of our constitution'.⁷⁰ Denunciations against the French envoy were, from the very beginning, the club's main field of activity, which was not unusual for French revolutionary political clubs.⁷¹ Moreover, considering the many cases of defection of French diplomats, there was good reason to be suspicious: 'What has given the greatest disadvantage to the patriots since the beginning of our glorious revolution, was not so much the arms of our enemies as the incurable *incivisme* of our representatives to foreign powers.'⁷² On 12 September, the club requested affiliation with Parisian clubs⁷³ and denounced Descorches at the National Convention: 'His conduct is a series of small treasons to the common cause, until his own interest brings him (it must be feared) to openly betray his country [*patrie*].'⁷⁴ The accusations against the French envoy were manifold: when he arrived in Istanbul, he lived at the house of the 'illegitimate' deputy of the *nation* Beuf, who had signed the counter-revolutionary document of 7 October 1792;⁷⁵

20. Lejeune, assistant writer. See Club of Constantinople to Jacobin Club of Paris, 18 December 1793, MAE, CP Turquie 186, fol. 432.

⁶⁵ Hénin, Bruguière, Olivier, Sicard, Dizerand, Amic, Pailharez, Comnene, Luzin.

⁶⁶ Florenville, Noyane, Renaud, Venel. ⁶⁷ Péllissier, Chenié, Bertrand, Jannin, Lison.

⁶⁸ Hénin, Bruguière, Olivier, Sicard, Noyane, Dizerand, Amic, Chenié, Comnene, Bertrand, Luzin.

⁶⁹ Hunt, *Politics, Culture, and Class in the French Revolution*, 181.

⁷⁰ Club of Constantinople, 'Réflexions sur la conduite de monsieur Descorches avec le citoyen Luzin', 6 September 1793, MAE, CP Turquie 185, fol. 301.

⁷¹ 'Many popular societies included a commitment to surveillance and denunciation in their foundation charters, as a fundamental obligation of membership.' See Tackett, *The Coming of the Terror in the French Revolution*, 131. See also Colin Lucas, 'The Theory and Practice of Denunciation in the French Revolution', *Journal of Modern History*, 68(4) (1996), 768–85.

⁷² Club of Constantinople, 'Réflexions sur la conduite de monsieur Descorches avec le citoyen Luzin', 6 September 1793, MAE, CP Turquie 185, fol. 300.

⁷³ Club of Constantinople to Society of Sans-culottes of Paris, 12 September 1793, MAE, CP Turquie 185, fol. 360. See Chapter 4.

⁷⁴ Club of Constantinople to National Convention, 12 September 1793, MAE, CP Turquie 185, fol. 366.

⁷⁵ See Chapter 1.

Descorches hesitated to destroy the symbols of the monarchy;⁷⁶ he collaborated with counter-revolutionaries; he constrained free debates in a general assembly; he manipulated votes; he menaced the true patriots after they had gathered 'in private' at the embassy, sang revolutionary songs, and destroyed marble fleur-de-lis-ornaments on the premises; finally he tried to damage Franco-Ottoman relations.⁷⁷

Hénin can be seen as the main instigator of the popular society's denunciations against Descorches, as they clearly aimed at his removal. The chargé d'affaires accompanied the dispatch of the club with three more letters, addressed to the foreign minister, all dated 12 September 1793. The first letter repeated the allegations against the envoy: '[Descorches is] a very dangerous agent to employ at such a critical moment . . .'⁷⁸ In the second letter, Hénin demanded the recall of Descorches and proposed to replace the envoy with himself.⁷⁹ In the third letter of that day, Hénin was already making proposals in the event that the minister should appoint him to replace Descorches. First of all, he demanded at least the rank of minister plenipotentiary. Then, he requested money and personnel, in order to remedy the inconveniences Descorches was encountering.⁸⁰

Around the same time, Descorches proposed for the first time that Hénin should be recalled, to end the troubles in the French community.⁸¹ The foreign minister, however, at first only authorized the envoy to take 'rigorous measures' if Hénin disturbed the Ottoman negotiations. On the other hand, he subtly warned the envoy not to abuse this authorization.⁸² As a result, Descorches did not dare to use coercive measures against Hénin, no matter how obviously he undermined the authority of the French administration. In December 1793, the Committee of Public Safety finally decreed Hénin's recall.⁸³ However, since this decree was never communicated to the Levant, Hénin stayed and continued to throw spanners into the works of the French administration until he received his letter of recall from Verninac and left for France only shortly before Descorches, on 2 May 1795.⁸⁴ The French government's inability or unwillingness to recall Hénin and to discipline its unruly subaltern agents created a very odd situation in Istanbul, in which Descorches had to pay the salaries of all those fervent enemies of his administration

⁷⁶ See Chapter 9.

⁷⁷ Club of Constantinople, 'Motifs qui nous font douter du patriotisme du citoyen Descorches', 12 September 1793, MAE, CP Turquie 185, fols. 382–5.

⁷⁸ Hénin to Foreign Minister, 12 September 1793, MAE, CP Turquie 185, fol. 367. Hénin accused Descorches on yet another occasion of having a predilection for the suspects of counter-revolution (especially for the 'aristocratic' merchants); for not taking up residence in the embassy building; for prohibiting the celebration of 10 August at the embassy; for seeming satisfied at the news of Ambassador Sémonville's arrest; for not removing all symbols of the *ancien régime* at the embassy (apparently, there was still a portrait of the king in one of the rooms); and for acting against the interests of citizens of merit. See *ibid.*, fols. 367–9.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, fols. 370–1. ⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, fols. 373–8.

⁸¹ Descorches to Foreign Minister, 1 September 1793, MAE, CP Turquie 185, fol. 289.

⁸² Foreign Minister to Descorches, 7 October 1793, MAE, CP Turquie 186, fol. 75.

⁸³ 'Extrait des registres du Comité de salut public', 16 December 1793, MAE, CP Turquie 186, fol. 426.

⁸⁴ Hitzel, 'Étienne-Félix Hénin, un jacobin à Constantinople', 45–6.

who were on the government's payroll.⁸⁵ Moreover, as the French legation ran out of money, Descorches had to summon and request an advance from the same merchants who had been repeatedly accused of *incivisme* and aristocracy—and their denunciators were to receive the merchants' money. Understandably, the French envoy encountered some difficulties in convincing the assembled merchants to provide the funds for the consular administration:

The dominant feeling [of the assembly] was that of reluctance to provide funds for maintaining men who, they said, could only be seen as subjects of annoyance and alarm; as I have said, the majority of the government employees here form a phalanx from which inconsiderate, often unjust remarks against the merchants come almost all the time.⁸⁶

Meanwhile the denunciations of the Club of Constantinople against Descorches continued. In fact, they became increasingly aggressive. The envoy was no longer referred to as 'citizen'. He became Monsieur Descorches, as 'Monsieur' signified that he was not worthy of being called a citizen.⁸⁷ Furthermore, he was often referred to as 'ci-devant marquis' or as 'dancer of Antoinette'—implying that Descorches had once belonged to the entourage of the detested queen of France.⁸⁸ Furthermore, he was accused of being a royalist and his administration a form of 'aristocratic despotism'.⁸⁹ It should be borne in mind that this campaign to discredit the French envoy was launched in an environment where he was also attacked and discredited by the representatives of most European monarchies; they, however, did not question his political affiliations, so for example the English ambassador Ainslie wrote: '[Descorches] is undoubtedly a man of genius and great experience, but a downright zealous Jacobin that sticks at nothing to gain his ends . . .'⁹⁰

In October 1793, the jeweller Chenié, a member of the club, began to write to Maximilien Robespierre in Paris, the head of the Committee of Public Safety (who, it seems, never answered any of Chenié's letters).⁹¹ Accusations against Descorches were the only content of the jeweller's dispatches, which he continued to write until the fall of Robespierre. In November, Hénin went so far as to denounce Descorches at the infamous Revolutionary Tribunal in Paris: 'I persist . . . in guaranteeing that the agent of the Republic here betrays our dearest interests in the Levant and that he surrounds himself with people renowned for their aristocracy and royalism.'⁹²

⁸⁵ Descorches to Foreign Minister, 24 August 1793, MAE, CP Turquie 185, fol. 260.

⁸⁶ Descorches to Foreign Minister, 7 September 1793, MAE, CP Turquie 185, fol. 314.

⁸⁷ See, e.g. Hénin et al., Commented list of signatories, 19 January 1794, MAE, CP Turquie 186, fols. 523–4.

⁸⁸ Chenié to Robespierre, 9 October 1793, MAE, CP Turquie 186, fol. 79.

⁸⁹ Hénin to Foreign Minister, 25 November 1793, MAE, CP Turquie 186, fol. 345.

⁹⁰ Ainslie to Grenville, 11 November 1793, TNA, FO 78/14, fols. 269–70.

⁹¹ Chenié to Robespierre, 9 October 1793, MAE, CP Turquie 186, fols. 79–80.

⁹² Hénin to Revolutionary Tribunal, 20 November 1793, MAE, CP Turquie 186, fol. 326. The original reason for appealing to the Revolutionary Tribunal was a warning from the Spanish ambassador in Venice, who had contacted him, intimating that he knew from secret French documents that Hénin was disgraced in the eyes of his government and that it would be safer for him to emigrate. Hénin informed the foreign minister about the Spanish ambassador's letter and, since he apparently became nervous about the possible consequences of his correspondence with an enemy

It should be noted that the political clubs were active in denouncing local agents of the French government not only in Istanbul, but also in Izmir and Aleppo. The situation in Aleppo was, however, slightly different, since the members of the local club addressed their accusations directly to the denounced officials and were not intriguing behind their backs:

It is you whom we address, consuls and dragomans of the *échelle* of Aleppo, you and those like you, enemies a thousand times more dangerous to liberty than all the slaves of the despots, armed to destroy it. We will tear off the mask with which you conceal yourselves, to show you uncovered.⁹³

The Club of Aleppo's mistrust proved to be justified, since the consul St Marcel and two other government agents defected in 1794.⁹⁴ Descorches, on the other hand, was left in the dark about the allegations brought forward against him at the political clubs of Paris, the National Convention, the foreign ministry, the Committee of Public Safety, and the Revolutionary Tribunal. In a letter to the Paris Jacobins, the envoy declared that he did not know what he was accused of and that he had learned about the existence of the Club of Constantinople only from the newspapers:

I read . . . in the *Moniteur* . . . : 'Society of Jacobins. A letter from the *Club populaire* of Constantinople requests affiliation; affiliation granted.' You will surely be surprised, brothers and friends, to hear that we needed this paragraph to give about five-sixths of the French living here certain knowledge of the existence of the club in question. Why such secrecy, why such mystery, if this association is worthy of the name that it has given itself?⁹⁵

In the end, after some debate, the Paris Jacobins rejected an affiliation with the Club of Constantinople (see Chapter 4). As a result, when newspaper reports on the affiliation debate reached Istanbul, in December 1793, Hénin and his partisans decided to dissolve the club.⁹⁶ In a letter to the Jacobin Club of Paris, they nevertheless claimed that they had never taken any steps to interfere in the negotiations with the Sublime Porte and that they only convened in great secrecy in order not to cause any offence to the Ottoman government.⁹⁷ The act of

ambassador, he decided to try to defend himself in advance from any accusation by soliciting the Revolutionary Tribunal in Paris to judge his behaviour. Nevertheless, he could not resist accusing his rival at the same time. Cf. Hénin to Committee of Public Safety, 20 November 1793, MAE, CP Turquie 186, fol. 327.

⁹³ Club of Aleppo, 'Mémoire sur l'échelle d'Alep', 31 October 1793, MAE, CP Turquie 186, fol. 256.

⁹⁴ The Austrians, under whose protection St Marcel passed, considered him nevertheless to be an 'enraged democrat'. The Austrian ambassador only granted him protection 'out of consideration' for St Marcel's uncle, former French ambassador St Priest. See Herbert to Thugut, 25 June 1794, HHStA, Türkei II, 107, June, fol. 369.

⁹⁵ Descorches to Jacobin Club of Paris, 21 November 1793, MAE, CP Turquie 186, fol. 328.

⁹⁶ Club of Constantinople to Jacobin Club of Paris, 18 December 1793, MAE, CP Turquie 186, fol. 432.

⁹⁷ Club of Constantinople to Jacobin Club of Paris, 18 December 1793, MAE, CP Turquie 186, fol. 434.

dissolution was signed by only ten members of the club, which gives us some idea of the number of really active members. Moreover, they announced that they would nevertheless continue to 'monitor' the activities of the local French government agents.⁹⁸ And indeed, if anything, the attacks against Descorches and his subordinate officials became more aggressive and they did not end until the recall of the French envoy.

REPUBLICAN INSUBORDINATION

Uncertainty about the application of both the new laws of France and the old regime regulations for the Levant was a great obstacle to the maintenance of the authority of French government agents in the Ottoman Empire. This was especially true since such uncertainty was a central point of the critique of the most fervent supporters of the Revolution. How could they trust government officials who declared themselves republican, but who insisted on the execution of an *ancien régime* ordinance? After all, treason seemed to be omnipresent, in France and in the Levant. Thus, especially in the time between the defection of Choiseul-Gouffier, in late 1792, and the beginning of increased interference by the French government, in the summer of 1794 (see Chapter 8), French government officials had to deal with frequent instances of republican insubordination. Zealous French revolutionaries in the Levant demanded the enforcement of all new French laws in the expatriate communities, even if the application of these laws was unfeasible. Furthermore, because the ordinance of 1781 had become obsolete, in their eyes, and because the National Convention had not yet promulgated a new 'basic law' for the Levant, some republicans considered it their duty to take the regime change into their own hands, which inevitably led to conflicts with the consular agents of their communities. In the French community of Cairo, for example, Consul General Charles Magallon was politically ousted by general assemblies of the French residents:⁹⁹

These assemblies have been organized for a while now, a president and two secretaries have been appointed; they take place in my consular hall, which is now called the communal hall; they convene their assemblies before I have any knowledge of it, I am summoned like all the other French, and fearing I might have the slightest preponderance in those assemblies, they placed the president and the secretaries on the sofa for the sole reason of evicting me [from that place], as well as some veterans who had been

⁹⁸ Hénin, Florenville, Péllissier, Pailharez, Chenié, Comnene, Renaud, Bertrand, Jannin, Lison. See Club of Constantinople to Jacobin Club of Paris, 18 December 1793, MAE, CP Turquie 186, fol. 433.

⁹⁹ Magallon later became one of the principal organizers of the invasion of Egypt in 1798. At the beginning of 1793, Magallon, who before the Revolution had lived in Cairo for many years as a merchant, was sent from France to Egypt as consul general. He was vested, in 1793, with the same rights and privileges as his *ancien régime* predecessors. No instructions were given to him, concerning the new political circumstances and how to apply them in his domain. See Magallon to Descorches, 20 June 1794, MAE, CP Turquie 188, fols. 151–4.

sitting there with me and who find themselves now inconvenienced to sit for four hours on chairs. One could say that the president is the only person holding the police power in this *échelle*, [and] he directs, with his secretaries and commissaires, the civic festivals; the banquets which are organized at these festivals seldom end without scandal. I am compelled to attend them, but I cannot bring them to order; it is the president and his commissaires who have that right, and I assure you, citizen envoy, that if this regime has to continue, it will be quite useless for the Republic to pay any officials; one can leave the direction of all affairs to a committee and the representation to the sitting president!¹⁰⁰

Was this the state of the French communities in the Levant in general? Did democratic assemblies also disempower French government officials elsewhere? Did local French citizens usurp the functions of the consulate and even chase their consul from his sofa in his own house? The example of the French community in Cairo, consisting of maybe about thirty people,¹⁰¹ was certainly an extreme case and Magallon, in his letter to Descorches, might have exaggerated the degree of his loss of authority.

Nevertheless, insubordination had become a problem for all French administrators in the Levant. For example, in the two most important communities, Istanbul and Izmir, the self-declared 'patriots' organized themselves into political clubs, as we have seen, and challenged the authority of government agents by criticizing their management of consular affairs and by denouncing them in France as aristocratic traitors. Descorches commented on these ardent French revolutionaries:

[The] experience of Smyrna and [Constantinople] taught me to be wary of these men of the Levant, who at seven to eight hundred leagues from our regenerating home [*foyer régénérateur*] have caught fire too fast. Under this seemingly beautiful flame, I have so far found only pride, ambition, and personal animosities.¹⁰²

One telling instance of the resistance to a republican administration that was still executing *ancien régime* regulations was the civil disobedience of the merchant Florenville.

Florenville was a devoted republican from the start. He was the only one of the thirteen merchants composing the French *nation* in Istanbul who refused to sign the counter-revolutionary declaration of 7 October 1792 asking Choiseul-Gouffier to resume his office as representative of the French king (see Chapter 1). During the diplomatic 'interregnum', he corresponded with the foreign ministry, transmitting an Ottoman request for military specialists to be sent to Istanbul as instructors.¹⁰³ When Descorches arrived in Istanbul, he saw in Florenville a natural ally. However, their relationship deteriorated after the arrival of Hénin. Florenville became a partisan of the latter and an active member of the political club of Istanbul.¹⁰⁴ In

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., fol. 154.

¹⁰¹ Faivre d'Arcier, *Les Oubliés de la liberté*, 16.

¹⁰² Descorches to Commissaire of External Relations, 1 September 1794, MAE, CP Turquie 188, fol. 525.

¹⁰³ Florenville to Foreign Minister, 10 May 1793, MAE, CP Turquie 184, fols. 355–6.

¹⁰⁴ Club of Constantinople to Society of Sans-culottes of Paris, 12 September 1793, MAE, CP Turquie 185, fol. 360.

July 1793, the French envoy suggested Florenville as replacement for the consul in Izmir, who had emigrated.¹⁰⁵ Yet, two months later, Descorches had changed his opinion, since in the meantime, around 10 August 1793, the schism among the French republicans of Istanbul had become obvious. From this time onwards, Florenville actively participated in denouncing Descorches to his superiors. The envoy, on the other hand, now considered Florenville unfit to become consul in the most important commercial centre of the Levant. Instead, he proposed to appoint Florenville as consul to Aleppo, but this suggestion, too, did not lead to anything.¹⁰⁶

To understand the direct confrontation between Florenville and Descorches which ensued from December 1793 onwards, it is necessary to retrace the French envoy's modifications to the administration of the French community of Istanbul. In October 1793, the corporal punishment of a French citizen by the Ottoman authorities (the Roubaud affair, which will be described later in this chapter), led to the resignation of the two deputies of the *nation*, Beuf and Pech, in protest against what the French conceived as an outrageous violation of the capitulations. Hitherto, the two deputies had served as contact persons for the Sublime Porte, since Descorches was not officially recognized by the Ottoman government. The two deputies, however, had little authority over their fellow citizens, since their status was deemed illegitimate: 'Many people rightly saw in them not their own leaders, but only the leaders of the merchants' guild or the delegates of the Turkish government, which was against our capitulations.'¹⁰⁷ Nevertheless, the Ottoman government did not accept the resignation of Beuf and Pech. Descorches solved this disagreement quite elegantly, by appointing one of the former deputies, Vincent Pech, as proconsul to administer provisionally the consular affairs (police and administration) of the French community. Beuf, on the other hand, continued as deputy of the *nation* (i.e. of the guild-like corporation of the thirteen merchant companies), but was, as such, responsible for commercial affairs only. Through this measure, Descorches affirmed his own authority as *commissaire civil* or highest representative of the central government in the Levant, and, at the same time, conferred legitimacy on the proconsul, who was now appointed by an official of the French Republic. Furthermore, Descorches ensured the goodwill of the Sublime Porte through the continuity of personnel. The French envoy thus seized an excellent opportunity to ensure a smooth change of regime in the administration of the *échelle* of Istanbul, without causing new tensions.¹⁰⁸

What Descorches did not do was to dissolve the *nation* as a merchants' corporation altogether. He needed this old-regime institution because it supplied the French administration with cash, according to the ordinance of 1781. However, the very existence of a guild-like corporation was utterly incompatible with the laws of the French Republic. Therefore, when the merchants of the *nation* endeavoured

¹⁰⁵ Descorches to Foreign Minister, 10 July 1793, MAE, CP Turquie 185, fol. 64.

¹⁰⁶ Descorches to Foreign Minister, 1 September 1793, MAE, CP Turquie 185, fol. 291.

¹⁰⁷ Descorches to Foreign Minister, 20 October 1793, MAE, CP Turquie 186, fol. 171.

¹⁰⁸ Descorches's nomination of Pech, 7 October 1793, MAE, CP Turquie 186, fol. 76.

to elect a new deputy,¹⁰⁹ Florenville protested vehemently, arguing that the deputy had to be elected by a general assembly of all French residents, since guilds and other privileged corporations had been abolished by the Revolution.¹¹⁰ Beuf, the remaining deputy, replied that the merchants did not intend to form a privileged corporation, but since the regulations for the commerce of the Levant had not changed, they had to follow the rules of the government. He furthermore remarked that the deputies would henceforth not be called deputies of the *nation* but deputies of *commerce*.¹¹¹ Florenville, unsurprisingly, was not satisfied with this answer and abstained from the 'unconstitutional' election. The same thing happened in Izmir, where five merchants also declined to vote. Descorches criticized these abstentions. He argued that the deputies of commerce were not a political, but an administrative institution and that it was a prerogative of the government of the Republic to decide how to organize its administration.¹¹² Yet, he did not punish the behaviour of the absentees.

Descorches's accommodating approach notwithstanding, a confrontation with Florenville was eventually unavoidable. As a consequence of rejecting the deputies of commerce as unconstitutional, he also refused to cooperate with them when they and the merchants of the former *nation* were organizing an advance of 10,000 livres to fund the French consular administration in the Levant. Florenville even claimed that he was ready to furnish the 10,000 alone, so long as he was not compelled to deal with an institution he deemed illegal.¹¹³

What! Some merchants, who are almost all counter-revolutionaries, would subject me to their decisions and the minister of the Republic authorizes it? I would have never expected this reversal. So you want, citizen minister, to perpetuate in the Levant the vicious regime of the formerly privileged institutions; . . . I will never submit myself to their decisions, [or] to any of their regulations.¹¹⁴

Florenville announced that he would pay his share of the funding of the French administration, but only by order of Descorches and not by that of a merchant corporation.¹¹⁵ In his reply to Florenville, Descorches presented the whole matter as a mere bagatelle, which a true republican should not render unnecessarily complicated.¹¹⁶ In principle, Descorches agreed with Florenville that the administration in the Levant had to be reformed along republican lines. Nevertheless, he declared himself convinced that the old administrative system had to be retained until replaced in its entirety by the government:

¹⁰⁹ According to the royal ordinance, one deputy stood for (re-)election every year, on the first day of December. See *Ordonnance du roi, du 3 Mars 1781*, 49–50.

¹¹⁰ Florenville to Beuf, 1 December 1793, MAE, CP Turquie 186, fol. 363.

¹¹¹ Beuf to Florenville, 1 December 1793, MAE, CP Turquie 186, fol. 363.

¹¹² Descorches to Foreign Minister, 12 December 1793, MAE, CP Turquie 186, fol. 417.

¹¹³ Florenville to Descorches, 10 March 1794, MAE, CP Turquie 187, fol. 358.

¹¹⁴ Florenville to Descorches, 15 April 1794, MAE, CP Turquie 187, fol. 383.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*, fol. 384.

¹¹⁶ Descorches to Florenville, 15 April 1794, MAE, CP Turquie 187, fol. 405.

It seems to me that all your objections boil down to your opinion that the corporations of merchants should be abolished in every *échelle*. That is also my opinion . . . ; but no matter what importance I attach to this abolition . . . , I feel that we cannot strike at one part of the old organization of the Levant without bringing about a complete reorganization; this reorganization is linked to such great interests and depends on so many stratagems that it is the wisdom of the legislators to take their time to let them ripen . . . In short, citizen, it is neither for you to decide on the organization of the Levant, nor for me, nor for anybody but the people's sovereignty—which makes itself heard through its representatives. It is for their decrees only to set [the new rules] and, until then, for the old regulations to govern us.¹¹⁷

Descorches declared that only very unwillingly would he force Florenville to comply with the merchants' decision on the funding of the consular administration,¹¹⁸ but this was exactly what the envoy eventually had to do. Florenville obeyed Descorches's official order, but he protested against this measure and denounced the envoy as an 'oppressor'.¹¹⁹ Furthermore, he accused Descorches of deliberately maintaining the *ancien régime* in the Levant.¹²⁰ This was a grave reproach, especially for an official who knew that he had been denounced at the Revolutionary Tribunal in Paris a few months earlier. Since the beginning of the Revolution, many French officials had been accused of oppression—and many of those accused did not live for long.

What does this episode tell us about the problems of regime change for the authority of the French administration in the Levant? As we have seen, there was a consensus among all French republicans that the old administrative system of the *échelles* had to be changed and that the ordinance of 1781, with its focus on the authority of the king's representative and its privileging of guild-like merchant corporations, needed to be abolished. The dissent among the republicans lay in the answer to the question of how this change of regime was to be brought about. Descorches and his partisans considered the government in Paris the only legitimate institution to decide on how to reform the administration in the Levant. Therefore, while waiting for a law that would replace the ordinance of 1781, Descorches deviated from its application only where he deemed it absolutely necessary. His priority was stability, and he was convinced that he would jeopardize whatever stability was left if he abolished the ordinance without prior authorization from Paris. Moreover, Descorches did not consider the French communities in the Ottoman Empire as a part of France. Therefore, not all laws of the Republic applied there and consequently old regime institutions that had been abolished at home could still continue their existence, if this served the interest of the French Republic. This, however, was the main political point of contention between Descorches and the republican opposition in the Levant: Florenville and those who thought like him insisted that all French laws should be directly applied in the *échelles* and that all remnants of the old regime in the administration of the Levant

¹¹⁷ Ibid., fols. 405–6.

¹¹⁸ Ibid., fol. 407.

¹¹⁹ Protestation of Florenville, 23 April 1794, MAE, CP Turquie 187, fol. 456.

¹²⁰ Ibid., fols. 333–4.

had to be abolished immediately, without waiting for orders from Paris. Everything else was perceived by them to be counter-revolutionary behaviour—and they had reason to think so. Had not many traitors to the Revolution tried to maintain the old regime by arguing that they could not introduce any reforms without specific orders from above? This was the reasoning that, they believed, gave them the right to resist the representatives of the French state.

The word ‘oppressor’ was a key term in this context. Labelling Descorches as such was a call for insurrection, since the Declaration of the Rights of Man and Citizen of the suspended Constitution of 1793 declared it to be ‘the most sacred of rights and the most indispensable of duties’ to resist any kind of government oppression.¹²¹ Although the Constitution had been suspended and the government declared revolutionary until peace, the Declaration of Rights could not be suspended, as it was considered an assertion of natural and inalienable rights—rights which people had always possessed and which could not be abolished or suspended. All French residents in the Levant knew the stipulations of the Declaration of Rights and the Constitution of 1793, since they had been read out at revolutionary celebrations and gatherings of the French communities.¹²² Therefore, it is no surprise that the members of the republican opposition claimed the right of resistance for themselves, as Hénin did in early 1794: ‘Has not our sacred revolution enshrined as a principle that under oppression insurgency is a duty? Are we not here under the tyrannical oppression of an official who shows all the traits of the *ancien régime* [?]’¹²³ Finding a balance between the right to resist oppression and the affirmation of government authority was a challenge for both the rulers in Paris and the French administrators in the Levant. In both cases, the struggle ended with the stabilization of government authority and a roll-back of civil liberties. In the Ottoman Empire, however, the relative lack of means of coercion led to far less lethal confrontations between the representatives of state authority and the republican dissenters (see Chapter 8).

DEFECTION, EMIGRATION, AND THE THAINVILLE-EFFECT

Not all French residents in the Ottoman Empire were enthusiastic republicans: quite the contrary. A great number of government officials, merchants, and other Frenchmen decided not to accept the end of the monarchy and preferred emigration to acknowledgment of the new regime. As we have seen from the defections of

¹²¹ Declaration of the Rights of Man and Citizen of the Constitution of 1793, Article 35, quoted in Gosewinkel and Masing (eds.), *Die Verfassungen in Europa, 1789–1949*, 196.

¹²² At a general assembly in October 1793, for example, the Constitution and the Declaration of Rights were read out to the audience. After this, all attending citizens were called up individually to solemnly take an oath on the Constitution. Similar rituals were also performed at the revolutionary festivals. See Minutes of the general assembly of 4 October 1793, CADN, Constantinople, Ambassade, Série B3, unfoliated.

¹²³ Hénin to Foreign Minister, 8 February 1794, MAE, CP Turquie 187, fol. 59.

French representatives in Istanbul,¹²⁴ the point at which French officials decided to refuse to cooperate with the new regime, and their reasons for doing so, varied greatly. Ambassador Choiseul-Gouffier chose hidden resistance when he realized that the king was unable to restore his old position of power in the near future. He was not willing to accept a monarchy that was dominated by the National Assembly. For Choiseul-Gouffier's secretary Chalgrin, the point of emigration was reached when the monarchy was officially suspended. He did not want to acknowledge the Republic. Choiseul-Gouffier's provisional successor, the former dragoman Antoine Fonton, decided to resign from his post after the news of the Louis XVI's execution had reached the Ottoman capital. For him, as a Levantine Catholic, it was not fidelity to the king that caused his demission, but fear for his own salvation, as he declared to the deputies of the *nation*:

Born into a religion that at present condemns the principles of the French Revolution, I find myself excluded from the bosom of the church as a public official of the French Republic and I suffer terrible pains by continuing to fulfil the functions to which the national will called me. You will agree, gentlemen, that it is not for my age, ready to descend into the grave, to carelessly defy opinion, to compromise my conscience, and to incur the censures of the church; as long as my functions could be reconciled with what I owe to my religion, I remained faithful to my responsibilities; now that this is no longer possible, I consider it my duty to tender my resignation.¹²⁵

Four of the five dragomans of the French embassy, most of them also members of the Fonton family, also defected within a few days in late March and early April 1793.¹²⁶

Defection and emigration was nowhere easier than in the Levant. In France, emigration meant leaving behind most of one's property, which inevitably would be confiscated.¹²⁷ Fleeing the country was also highly dangerous. In the Ottoman Empire, however, French subjects could emigrate without even moving out of their homes. All they had to do was to walk over to a foreign embassy or consulate and ask for protection, which the enemies of France, in particular, granted willingly. The French authorities could do little to stop people from emigrating, since once they had become protégés of a foreign state, they also left French jurisdiction. Persecuting them would have been a breach of the capitulations. The only disadvantage, and for

¹²⁴ It should be noted that in this context the term 'defection' reflects a French republican perspective, since it implies a breach of loyalty by those government agents who resigned from office during the French Revolution. From a royalist perspective, however, the breach of loyalty consisted not in resigning and emigrating but in serving the Republic.

¹²⁵ Antoine Fonton to the deputies of the *nation*, 30 April 1793, CADN, Constantinople, Ambassade, Série B3.

¹²⁶ Antoine Fonton to Foreign Minister, 8 April 1793, MAE, CP Turquie 184, fol. 323; Joseph Fonton to Antoine Fonton, 28 March 1793, MAE, CP Turquie 184, fols. 292–3.

¹²⁷ In France, the persecution of émigrés was omnipresent. Even people such as Descorches and his wife were not safe from accusations of having violated the French laws against emigration. Madame Descorches, for example, needed a certificate of non-emigration from the foreign minister upon her return from Poland. See MAE, CP Turquie 184, fol. 276. See also Kirsty Carpenter, 'Emigration in Politics and Imaginations', in David Andress (ed.), *The Oxford Handbook of the French Revolution* (Oxford, 2015), 330–45; Friedemann Pestel, *Kosmopoliten wider Willen. Die monarchiens als Revolutionsemigranten* (Berlin, 2015).

merchants it was a great one, was that emigration meant the severance of all business contacts with France, as well as the confiscation of all property at home.¹²⁸

The defection of diplomatic and consular personnel was a major threat to the authority and control of the French state in the expatriate communities of the Ottoman Empire, as it greatly harmed the reputation of the French, and nearly led to a breakdown of local administration. The defection of Pierre Fonton, the French legation's chancellor in Istanbul, is a very good example of the degree of potential destabilization resulting from the emigration of officials. When Fonton placed himself under Russian protection, in October 1793, he decided to take the keys to the chancery's archives and the registers with him and to deliver both to the Ottoman government.¹²⁹ Although the Sublime Porte returned the keys and registers to the French republicans, this incident demonstrates what delicate situations could result from the emigration of government agents. The chancellor easily could have caused much more harm to the French community, for example by delivering the registers or important files of the archives (in which all contracts, all proofs of ownership, and the complete civil register of the community had been stored) to an enemy legation.

The instability of French authority, as a result of the defection of personnel, was itself used as a pretext for emigration. In early October 1793, for example, two French merchants emigrated in Istanbul, arguing in a letter to the deputies of the *nation* that their personal security, warranted by the capitulations, was no longer respected by the Ottoman authorities: '[It] is obvious that we are considered to be subjects of the Grand Seigneur and devoid of any protection from our government[.]'¹³⁰ Therefore, they decided to place themselves under Prussian protection. However, the style of their letters—not addressing the deputies as 'citizens', not mentioning the Republic at all, and referring to France as 'unfortunate country'¹³¹—clearly shows that these merchants were no friends of the new regime.

Most royalist French officials emigrated in 1793, although a few of them held out for longer, such as the French consul at Koroni (Coron) in the Peloponnese, Taitbout. He gave up his post only in early 1794, after the French recapture of Toulon made a quick overthrow of the Republic seem improbable.¹³² Among the French merchants, the greatest wave of emigration occurred in spring 1794, when rumours spread that the newly arrived French commissaire, Thainville, had orders to sequester the property of the French merchants.¹³³ The British ambassador, Ainslie, reported:

¹²⁸ Faivre d'Arcier argues that emigrated merchants kept their business ties with France. See Faivre d'Arcier, *Les Oubliés de la liberté*, 161. This may be true in a few cases, but it certainly was not easy to accomplish, as trading with émigrés was against French law.

¹²⁹ Fonton to the deputies of the *nation*, 5 October 1793, MAE, CP Turquie 186, fol. 70.

¹³⁰ Martel to the deputies of the *nation*, 4 October 1793, MAE, CP Turquie 186, fol. 63.

¹³¹ Thoron to the deputies of the *nation*, 4 October 1793, MAE, CP Turquie 186, fol. 63.

¹³² Minutes of an assembly in which consul Taitbout declared his resignation, 2 February 1794, MAE, CP Turquie 187, fol. 49.

¹³³ Ainslie to Grenville, 26 March 1794, TNA, FO 78/15, fol. 57. Similarly also the French envoy, who even reported that the Ottoman government had asked him for a statement on the mission of

Citizen Tinville has met a cool reception from the merchants, who at the instigation of their friends, and in view to preserve their fortunes from depredation, not only disavow his authority, but have solicited and obtained the protection of the reis efendi against all orders issued by agents unacknowledged by the Porte.¹³⁴

Considering the spelling Ainslie used, it is possible that, given the lack of reliable news from France, some people confused Thainville with Antoine Quentin Fouquier-Tinville, the infamous prosecutor of the Revolutionary Tribunal in Paris. It is also possible that Ainslie and others deliberately assimilated Thainville's name to that of this key figure of the Terror. The consequences of the rumours are striking, and indicate how much the reports of horrifying mass executions and other excesses of the Terror in France had shocked the French expatriates in the Levant. The arrival of Thainville, together with a number of French military experts, created such a panic among the French residents—who feared that the Terror would now come to them—that many of them emigrated. The French community in Salonica was the worst affected: on 26 and 27 March 1794, the members of seven out of the eleven existing French commercial establishments (more than thirty people) emigrated.¹³⁵ Descorches reported to the foreign minister:

They were seized by a terrible panic at the approach of our newly arrived *concitoyens*. I told you about the efforts of our enemies' malevolence to spread alarm about this event. [It was alleged that the newly arrived] were inquisitors, exterminators; I was supposed to be their first victim. What is most painful is that these words could also be found in French mouths, which gave them more substance. These poor people, misadvised, misguided, and some of them, no doubt, with bad intentions, they became frightened, lost their heads, and thus the debacle ensued. I only learned about it when the damage was already done. I was not even suspecting it; no warning signals had reached me.¹³⁶

The fear of the arrival of revolutionary commissaires had a similar effect in Izmir. There, the provisional consul listed about a dozen French who had passed under foreign protection owing to the 'Thainville-effect'.¹³⁷ Some of the merchants had even left the city and retired to their country houses in order to be safe from the dreaded commissaires. The provisional consul furthermore reported that he had sent a man after the émigrés, to convince them that they had been fooled by false rumours and that they would be pardoned if they returned. According to the consul, the émigrés protested that they had put themselves under foreign protection only temporarily. This would support the assumption that most of the French who emigrated because of the Thainville-effect were not enemies of the new

Thainville, and offered to assist Descorches if he should judge it necessary to make objections to the French government against the methods of the commissaire. See Descorches to Foreign Minister, 25 March 1794, MAE, CP Turquie 187, fol. 250.

¹³⁴ Ainslie to Grenville, 10 April 1794, TNA, FO 78/15, fol. 71.

¹³⁵ Table of the Frenchmen who had emigrated on 26 and 27 March 1794, MAE, CP Turquie 187, fol. 351.

¹³⁶ Descorches to Foreign Minister, 10 April 1794, MAE, CP Turquie 187, fol. 338.

¹³⁷ Roubaud to Descorches, 10 April 1794, MAE, CP Turquie 187, fol. 349.

regime, but sought foreign protection only to protect themselves from the horrors of the Terror.¹³⁸

The French community of Aleppo was seemingly also not exempt from the Thainville-effect, albeit with a delay of two months. On 2 June 1794, ten people emigrated, including the second dragoman and the consul general.¹³⁹ The emigration of the latter was quite remarkable: on the day of his defection, he first wrote a letter to Descorches, informing him of the recent wave of emigration, 'qualifying it in the way it should [be qualified] in a report animated by all the feelings of a loyal republican'.¹⁴⁰ Nevertheless, in the evening of the same day, possibly as a result of letters he had received from Istanbul, he emigrated himself.¹⁴¹

The French émigrés were a problem for the republican authorities in many regards. How should they deal, for example, with those republicans who stood in the service of an émigré?¹⁴² Émigrés were still living next door to loyal French republicans and it was impossible to prevent contact between the two groups. Émigrés were, therefore, ideal disseminators of rumours and intrigues aimed at destabilizing the French republican government's control over its citizens in the Ottoman Empire. The loss of French merchant companies was another grave result of emigration. Between 1794 and 1796, the number of French commercial establishments in the Levant fell from eighty-four to fifty.¹⁴³ French trade, which before the Revolution had controlled about three-fifths of the total European commerce with the Ottoman Empire,¹⁴⁴ never recovered from its setbacks during the last decade of the eighteenth century.¹⁴⁵ Therefore, although claiming that one should be glad that unworthy citizens were leaving the nation, Descorches also expressed his unease about the great numbers of émigrés and about the consequences which the emigrations might have on the reputation of the French among the Ottomans: 'I am quite distressed at the thought that we are also losing some well-established trading houses . . . , especially considering the impression this will make on the local people here.'¹⁴⁶ By the end of 1794, 106 French had emigrated, 23 of whom had been government officials (see Table 7.1).

¹³⁸ Ibid.

¹³⁹ Excerpt from the registers of the consulate general in Aleppo, 3 June 1794, CADN, Constantinople, Ambassade, Série D, Alep 25, fol. 99.

¹⁴⁰ Descorches to Commission of External Relations, 25 June 1794, MAE, CP Turquie 188, fol. 178.

¹⁴¹ Ibid.

¹⁴² Descorches to Foreign Minister, 25 February 1794, MAE, CP Turquie 187, fol. 138.

¹⁴³ Faivre d'Arcier, *Les Oubliés de la liberté*, 161.

¹⁴⁴ Orville, *The Diplomatic Retreat of France and Public Opinion on the Eve of the French Revolution*, 46.

¹⁴⁵ The invasion of Egypt was the final death blow for French commerce in the Levant. Alfred C. Wood, *A History of the Levant Company* (Oxford, 1935), 186–7. Edhem Eldem holds that the breakdown of French commerce in the Ottoman Empire was largely due to the weakening of state support for French merchants. I doubt this assessment. Why, in that case, did French trade not recover after the stabilization of consular authority in the years 1795–8? Also, after the end of the Egyptian invasion, French trade did not recover. Even the short war between Britain and the Ottoman Empire (1807–9) did not help the French, so that, by 1809, 'as a result of the prolonged struggle in Europe, all the . . . rivals [of the British trade] in the Levant market had either disappeared or been excluded by English sea power'. See Wood, *A History of the Levant Company*, 191–2; cf. Eldem, 'Istanbul', 193.

¹⁴⁶ Descorches to Foreign Minister, 25 April 1794, MAE, CP Turquie 187, fol. 440.

Table 7.1 Emigrations by the end of 1794. 'État général des français émigrés dans les échelles du Levant', around November 1794, MAE, CP Turquie 189, fol. 269.

City/Territory	Total number of emigrations (including government agents)	Emigrated government agents
Istanbul	34	9
Izmir	22	2
Salonica	22	3
Aleppo	13	3
Bursa	3	—
Peloponnese	2	1
Alexandria	3	2
Rhodes	2	2
Chania	2	—
Latakia	1	1
Edirne	1	—
Damietta	1	—
TOTAL	106	23

OFFSHOOTS OF THE REVOLUTIONARY WAR ON OTTOMAN SOIL

Challenges to the authority of the French administration in the Levant did not come only from unruly French subjects (be they republicans or counter-revolutionaries). A constant potential threat to French autonomy was the possible interference of the Ottoman state. The Sublime Porte did not wish to get involved in the affairs of the expatriate communities, as a rule, and only did so when public peace was disturbed. This was the case whenever violence broke out between the members of different communities. The Revolutionary Wars were not only fought on the battlefields of Europe and on the Ottoman seas, but also led to numerous clashes between partisans of the belligerent states in Ottoman cities.

The port of Izmir was one of the main battlegrounds. French and British seamen often came to blows in this port, since it was here that unemployed sailors gathered, waiting for a passage back to France or Britain. In May 1793, the British consul, Hayes, reported that some idle British sailors, 'being at liberty to rove about the town, frequenting taverns and other disorderly houses . . . [soon] met with a French officer in the street [and] thought fit to knock off his hat and toss about his cockade, which he recovered and got away from them as soon as possible'.¹⁴⁷ This incident was not without consequences. The situation escalated the next day:

[A]t a dinner given at the Inn [with the telling name 'English and Dutch Tavern'],¹⁴⁸ . . . the seamen having been regaled with wine and beer, merry dancing upon the wharf

¹⁴⁷ Hayes to Ainslie, 17 May 1793, TNA, FO 78/14, fol. 139.

¹⁴⁸ 'Narration of the affray which happened between the French and English seamen at Smyrna on the 12th May 1793', TNA, FO 78/14, fol. 146.

before the door, several French seamen landed there, belonging to [a] French bark of war . . . , apparently with an intention to produce a quarrel and began dancing and singing *Ça ira* and other patriotic songs and behaving in an insolent manner[.] [A] fray soon commenced, when the French were beaten off, though our people were unarmed and some of them had cutlasses[.] [B]ut a great part of the crew of the bark soon returned, armed, to assassinate our people, who defended themselves as well as they could, with spirit and bravery, wrenching two of their cutlasses and some other weapons from them and retreated into the inn and other adjacent places[.] [D]uring this conflict, some of the Slavonians¹⁴⁹ belonging to Venetian ships and others, receiving some insult from the French and provoked to see the English unarmed assaulted in a dangerous manner, took part in the fray and a great deal of firing ensued on all sides, which ended at last, as luckily night approached, with one Frenchman killed, another being mortally wounded, and several others much wounded, five of the English slightly, some Slavonians also . . . ¹⁵⁰

The Ottoman authorities reacted to this incident by sending out a guard, which patrolled during the night and the next day. The local Ottoman officials sent messages to all consuls announcing that, ‘as this is a neutral port of the Grand Signior, they are determined to suffer no acts of hostility to be committed here . . . and that those who transgress those orders, they will seize and punish . . . ’¹⁵¹ By and large, the Ottoman authorities were able to prevent open hostilities between members of the foreign communities. Nevertheless, Izmir continued to be troubled with tensions and quarrels between French and other seamen, which sometimes ended in street fights.¹⁵²

Insults and quarrels between French republicans and their enemies were also frequent in other cities of the Ottoman Empire. One significant incident for the French community in Istanbul, which demonstrated how fragile their autonomy had become due to ‘intercommunal’ hostilities, was the Roubaud affair. This began on 24 September 1793 in a similar way to the fights in Izmir. Two merchant captains, the citizens Roubaud and Guérin, went for a walk at about four o’clock in the afternoon on the principal street of Pera (today’s İstiklal Caddesi). They soon got into an aggressive quarrel with two Greeks under Russian protection. Roubaud knocked out one of his adversaries by clubbing him over the head with his walking stick. At this moment, the Ottoman guard arrived on the scene and ended the fight. According to French reports, the Greek’s injury was not very dangerous and the man recovered after two days. Nevertheless, shortly after the guard had departed, a crowd of Greeks and Russians, armed with sabres, gathered to take revenge. The

¹⁴⁹ Slavonia is a historic region in what is today mainly eastern Croatia. In an Eastern Mediterranean context, however, it seems that the term ‘Slavonian’ was used to refer to Slavic Venetian subjects (mainly Dalmatians).

¹⁵⁰ Hayes to Ainslie, 17 May 1793, TNA, FO 78/14, fol. 139. Emphasis in original.

¹⁵¹ *Ibid.*, fol. 140.

¹⁵² e.g. Hayes to Ainslie, 26 October 1793 TNA, FO 78/14, fol. 218. Furthermore, especially after the capture of the French frigate *Sybille* (see Chapter 2), the British merchants in Izmir feared that enraged French seamen might burn and plunder their houses, killing them and their families. The Ottoman authorities, however, were able to keep the situation calm. See Liston to Grenville, 25 July 1794, TNA, FO 78/15, fol. 200.

two Frenchmen took refuge in a French-owned tavern (Chez Menard),¹⁵³ where they were besieged by the crowd. According to French sources, the chancellor of the Russian legation was present at this siege, shouting: 'We must exterminate these French wretches, we must kill them all, these villains . . . these rebels . . . these regicides, we must shoot them dead.'¹⁵⁴ When the French envoy heard about the quarrel, he immediately sent his secretary Gaudin to the governor (*voyvoda*) of Galata for help. But although Gaudin had lived in Istanbul for two years, his Turkish was not good enough to make himself understood at the governor's residence. So the secretary first had to go and find a dragoman before he could request the *voyvoda* to send a guard up the hill to Pera and to escort the two besieged Frenchmen down from the French inn to Descorches's house in Galata.¹⁵⁵

The affair would probably have ended here, if not for the Russian ambassador. The first Russian ambassador since the end of the last Russo-Ottoman war (1787–92) was soon to arrive in the Ottoman capital. The Russian legation pressured the Ottoman government to punish captain Roubaud, whom the Russians held responsible for the fight. The Ottoman authorities made their own enquiries into the case, but the two officials in charge of the police in Galata and Pera (the *voyvoda* and the *topçubaşı*) had filed contradictory reports. Nevertheless, in the end it was decided that Roubaud had to be punished—whether this happened out of a conviction of his guilt, or because of the necessity to appease the Russians, is not clear. According to the capitulations, however, a Frenchman could be punished only if the French authorities extradited him. The French, however, had declared Roubaud innocent. Nevertheless, to end this affair, the French first dragoman offered 500 piastres to the *voyvoda* for his good offices to mediate an amicable agreement with the Russian side. One week after the quarrel, Roubaud and the second French dragoman went to the *voyvoda* in the expectation of concluding an extrajudicial settlement of the dispute. However, the Russian side, it seems, had only pretended to accept such an agreement, in order to lure the French captain to the *voyvoda*'s residence. Now, the attendant Russian dragoman claimed that he knew nothing about an amicable settlement and insisted that the Frenchman be punished. The *voyvoda*, apparently unsure how to proceed, left his residence to consult the *reis efendi*. After two hours, he came back with explicit orders to inflict a bastinado (foot whipping) on the French captain.

Although it seems that the punishment was executed in a more or less symbolic manner and without seriously hurting Roubaud—afterwards the *voyvoda* offered him coffee—it produced an outcry in the French community.¹⁵⁶ In the eyes of the French, the bastinado was an unheard-of breach of the capitulations, which called into question the very existence of the French communities in the Levant. Both deputies of the *nation* resigned. Descorches threatened to leave the Ottoman

¹⁵³ This was the only French inn on the principal street of Pera. It played an important role, therefore, in the social life of the French community (see Chapter 9).

¹⁵⁴ 'Memoire historique' concerning the Roubaud affair, 19 October 1793, MAE, CP Turquie 186, fol. 7. Ellipses are in the original.

¹⁵⁵ Ibid., fol. 7.

¹⁵⁶ Ibid., fols. 7–11.

capital, to retire to Edirne, and from there possibly to go back to France (after receiving orders from Paris).¹⁵⁷ In two impassioned general assemblies, the French residents even discussed the option of completely abandoning Istanbul.¹⁵⁸ For the Ottoman authorities, on the other hand, the punishment of the French captain was a justified reaction to a disturbance of the public peace. Their position is understandable considering that, from an Ottoman point of view, the capitulations were not bilateral treaties, but privileges granted by the sultan. 'In actual fact, the capitulations were not treaties; . . . and the rights that they gave to their beneficiaries were not a form of exclusion from the law but, on the contrary, an attempt at bringing them into a manageable legal structure.'¹⁵⁹ If those benefitting from the capitulations did not behave with propriety, why would it be inequitable for the Ottoman authorities to restore law and order by inflicting a reasonable punishment?

The Roubaud affair clearly showed how precarious the autonomy of the French was, especially when the French communities in the Levant were not backed by a powerful and stable state. It should be kept in mind that France in October 1793 had lost its Mediterranean naval base, Toulon, to the British. Furthermore, the Roubaud affair happened at the very moment when Descorches was negotiating the sultan's credit for the French frigates in Izmir (see Chapter 2). The autonomy of the French communities and the authority of the French administration over the French expatriates were mutually dependent: without authority, no autonomy, and vice versa. In the face of the Ottoman 'assault', Descorches hoped that his compatriots would regain their sense of unity, and, by implication, their respect for the consular authorities.¹⁶⁰ He tried to depict the whole affair as a Russian intrigue aimed at alienating the French and Ottomans from each other. Furthermore, Descorches tried to give the Ottoman government the impression that the French were particularly strict with those compatriots who did not behave in accordance with decorum. A few weeks after the Roubaud affair, a note to the *reis efendi* reported that one Frenchman, who had quarrelled with an émigré, had been sent to prison: '[The] respect for this hospitable soil where [the French] live is so great that they know how to punish rigorously those among them who disturb the public tranquillity.'¹⁶¹ At the same time, the letter demanded satisfaction from the Sublime Porte for Russian assaults on the French, including the ripping off of some French hats, the defiling of cockades, and a violent intrusion into a French house.¹⁶² And indeed, the French received satisfaction: both hats and cockades were returned, and one Russian bastinadoed.¹⁶³

¹⁵⁷ Note by Descorches to the Sublime Porte, 1 October 1793, CADN, Constantinople, Ambassade, Série B1, unfoliated.

¹⁵⁸ Minutes of the general assembly of 4 October 1793, CADN, Constantinople, Ambassade, Série B3, unfoliated. The other assembly was on 8 October 1793.

¹⁵⁹ Eldem, 'Capitulations and Western Trade', 293.

¹⁶⁰ Descorches to Foreign Minister, 10 October 1793, MAE, CP Turquie 186, fol. 87.

¹⁶¹ Pech to Reis Efendi, 23 October 1793, CADN, Constantinople, Ambassade, Série B1, unfoliated.

¹⁶² Ibid.

¹⁶³ Descorches to Foreign Minister, 10 November 1793, MAE, CP Turquie 186, fol. 278.

Violent encounters between French revolutionaries and their enemies continued to be frequent. In January 1794, a French seaman was reportedly attacked by a servant of the Austrian first interpreter as he left the French inn, entering the unlit main street of Pera.¹⁶⁴ The servant gave a sabre blow to the seaman's back, cutting through the sailor's winter attire to the flesh. Two days later, the main street was once again the scene of a fight: this time, according to a French report, some Russians insulted their French adversaries and drew their sabres. The French were armed with pistols that they fired into the air, which convinced the Russians to withdraw. Some days later, it was the turn of Russians to shoot at some Frenchmen. The French, however, managed to disarm their assailants.¹⁶⁵ As a reaction to these frequent confrontations, the Sublime Porte decided at some point in late 1793 or early 1794 to bar Frenchmen from carrying weapons—a measure which the French regarded as a plot against the very existence of their community, and which they opposed vehemently, arguing that it would expose them to mortal danger.¹⁶⁶ It seems, however, that this prohibition was widely disregarded.

The danger of violent quarrels was particularly high on the days when French revolutionary festivals were celebrated in Istanbul and elsewhere. The French authorities had good reason to impose strict regulations for avoiding confrontations between 'patriotically charged', and often not completely sober French republicans, and their adversaries (see Chapter 9). Nevertheless, sometimes these measures failed. The most prominent example was a tumult in front of the Austrian embassy, on 28 June 1794, the day when a new tricolour flag was inaugurated in Istanbul.¹⁶⁷ According to French accounts, the whole incident was caused by an Austrian coachman who hit a French boy aged 15 or 16 years. This happened when a bunch of French sailors came from the ceremony of the flag exchange in the port of Istanbul, up the main street of Pera, to join a dance around the tree of liberty in the French embassy's garden. One thing led to another and an angry French crowd gathered in front of the gates of the Austrian embassy and menaced the people inside. The scene ended when Ottoman troops arrived and dispersed the crowd.¹⁶⁸ Although nothing serious had happened, the Austrians were able to convince the Ottoman government that drastic measures were necessary. The Sublime Porte once more ordered the disarming of all Frenchmen. Furthermore, all Frenchmen without employment were to be shipped off to France.¹⁶⁹ At first Descorches protested to the *reis efendi* against this order as an infringement of the capitulations, denouncing it as 'a document drawn up in the darkness of some subaltern office

¹⁶⁴ Henin to Foreign Minister, 26 January 1794, MAE, CP Turquie 187, fol. 38.

¹⁶⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶⁶ Pech to Reis Efendi, 12 February 1794, CADN, Constantinople, Ambassade, Série B1, unfoliated.
¹⁶⁷ i.e. the French flag we know today with the colour sequence blue–white–red. See also Chapter 1.

¹⁶⁸ Descorches to Reis Efendi, 30 June 1794, MAE, CP Turquie 188, fols. 224–5.

¹⁶⁹ *Ferman* of the Sublime Porte to the *voyvoda* of Galata, 30 June 1794, TNA, FO 78/15, fols. 192–3. This measure corresponded to general Ottoman policing practices under Selim III. In 1791, for example, after a man had thrown a musket ball at the sultan during the Friday prayer at Ayasofya Mosque, Selim III gave orders to deport unemployed people without guarantors to their places of origin. See Başaran, *Selim III, Social Policing in Istanbul at the End of the Eighteenth Century*, 2; Yaycıoğlu, *Partners of the Empire*, 46.

under the dictate of intriguers in the pay of our common enemies'.¹⁷⁰ However, it did not take long for the French envoy to realize that the Ottoman government's command offered him a chance safely to send home a great number of the unemployed sailors he had to provide for, as well as some of his political adversaries. After all, the Sublime Porte hired a Greek ship at its own cost and obtained guarantees of safe conduct from all enemy ambassadors. One month later, Descorches depicted the police measure of the Ottoman government as a great opportunity:

The Porte has obtained and delivered to me the most explicit passes for the safety of the Hydriot¹⁷¹ vessel, which should transport to a port of the Republic, from this capital and from Smyrna, two hundred of our *concitoyens* who have the burning desire to return to their *patrie*. The satisfaction they show and the zeal with which they make their preparations are really touching to see.¹⁷²

Needless to say, when explaining the reasons for the tumult in front of the Austrian embassy to the *reis efendi*, Descorches presented the whole event as yet another intrigue of the anti-French diplomats, who were constantly provoking the French. He gave the example of an agent provocateur named 'the Parisian'. Just the other day he had entered a café and insulted the French republican guests who were smoking their pipes there; they kept calm, in order not to produce any disturbances. Later, the same Parisian paraded through the main street of Pera with the white flag of the monarchy in one hand, and a pistol in the other, shouting 'Vive Louis XVII!' Nevertheless, Descorches claimed, the republicans had kept a cool head and did not quarrel with this provocateur.¹⁷³

CONCLUSION

As this chapter has shown, the period of greatest uncertainty about the applicability of the French new regime's laws in the expatriate communities of the Levant lasted for almost two years, from the end of 1792 to the second half of 1794. However, the paradoxical situation, in which French republican administrators had to enforce an *ancien régime* ordinance, persisted to some degree in the following years. The instructions to Descorches's successor Verninac, drawn up in late 1794, give a clear idea to what extent the French government warranted independent modifications of the 1781 ordinance:

Everything which in this code is an immediate consequence of the treaties [i.e. the capitulations] [and] cannot be changed so long as the treaties are not changed. There are other provisions that can and should be changed: those which, without immediately ensuing from the treaties, are contrary to the principles and laws of the

¹⁷⁰ Descorches to Reis Efendi, 1 July 1794, MAE, CP Turquie 188, fol. 226.

¹⁷¹ From the Greek island of Hydra.

¹⁷² Descorches to Commission of External Relations, 8 August 1794, MAE, CP Turquie 188, fol. 398.

¹⁷³ Descorches to Reis Efendi, 1 July 1794, MAE, CP Turquie 188, fols. 227–8.

Republic... In principle, only the government of the Republic is authorized to reform the code and the old regulations have to be executed until it is otherwise ordered. It takes an express declaration of the legislature for each law of the Republic to be applicable in the *échelles* of the Levant... However... Citizen Verninac is authorized to temporarily make reforms regarding the local administration of the *échelles*. These reforms will be proposed, debated, and granted in an assembly of the French residents, [who have been] established [in the *échelle*] for more than one year; members of other *échelles* will be admitted...¹⁷⁴

Under these circumstances, can we really speak of a regime change or a revolution in the French communities in the Ottoman Empire? Amaury Faivre d'Arcier cast some doubt on this, because the legal framework did not change in the Levant and, had it not been for the war, Frenchmen would have lived in the same way as before the Revolution. In a way they were, therefore, forgotten by liberty.¹⁷⁵ However, at least in theory, the principle that the structures of the *ancien régime* should continue to function until they were replaced by new ones also existed for the French mainland.¹⁷⁶

In order to assess the developments in the Levant, it may be useful to take into consideration another great revolution of the century. The political conflict that led to the independence of thirteen British colonies in North America was, from a specific perspective, an inverted version of the revolutionary process in the French communities in the Levant. The American Revolution did not come to pass because the thirteen colonies had been forgotten by liberty, but because the colonists believed that their liberty was menaced by the British crown. Hence, there was no need, as in the French case, to change the complete internal legal framework of the thirteen colonies. So we may ask: if the legal framework was not changed, then where was the revolution?

Robert Palmer, in his seminal work on *The Age of the Democratic Revolution*, dealt with a similar question. Palmer argued for the relatedness of the events in America and France and, therefore, needed to show that what had happened in America was in fact a revolution and not only a war of independence. He based his assessment, inter alia, on the examination of two criteria: emigration and loss of property.¹⁷⁷ Emigration due to the French Revolution, as we have seen, was a reality in the French expatriate communities in the Ottoman Empire. If the political and legal situation in the French communities had been largely untouched by the Revolution, and the *ancien régime* maintained, why then did so many French decide to emigrate? The loss of property of those who turned against the Revolution, on the other hand, was a much more limited phenomenon in the Levant than in France and America. Émigrés could easily keep all those possessions that were not in reach of the French authorities. All French merchants, however, lost a great

¹⁷⁴ Instructions for Verninac, MAE, CP Turquie 189, fols. 186–7.

¹⁷⁵ Faivre d'Arcier, *Les Oubliés de la liberté*, 7–11.

¹⁷⁶ Tackett, *The Coming of the Terror in the French Revolution*, 71–2.

¹⁷⁷ Robert R. Palmer, *The Age of the Democratic Revolution: The Challenge*, 2 vols. (Princeton, 1959), vol. 1, 185–8.

deal of income as a result of the war. The war had an enormous impact on the life of the French communities,¹⁷⁸ and the causes of this war are inextricably linked to the regime change in France. I would argue, therefore, that all local consequences of the war, including the breakdown of commerce, the military confrontations at sea, and the violent encounters between different national communities in the streets of Ottoman cities, were translocal effects of the French Revolution.

Moreover and most importantly, this chapter has demonstrated how much the authority of the French state was destabilized in the French communities. This profound tremor of government authority evidently resulted from the regime change in France. It brought with it a number of political phenomena in the expatriate communities which were also seen in France, such as a constant power struggle between the more radical and the more conservative political factions, an almost paranoid fear of treason, and mistrust of government officials.

Certainly, revolutionary agitation in the Ottoman Empire was tempered by the fact that these French communities were very small indeed, as well as by the constant threat of Ottoman intervention. Nevertheless, French expatriate communities witnessed a breakdown of stately authority, as did metropolitan France. However, in the Levant, the Ottoman state acted as a backup authority which prevented a power vacuum and thus precluded much violence, which erupted in France.¹⁷⁹ The 'Ottoman factor' had an ambivalent effect on the process of stabilization of the new regime in the French expatriate communities. On the one hand, it prevented revolutionary excesses. On the other hand, the Ottoman government also restricted the coercive powers of the French state towards its citizens in the Levant, as the next chapter will show.

¹⁷⁸ Faivre d'Arcier, *Les Oubliés de la liberté*, 11.

¹⁷⁹ See Tackett, *The Coming of the Terror in the French Revolution*, 71–82.

8

On Silent Feet Stabilizing the Regime Change in the French Communities

This chapter deals with coercion, and with its absence. It was not only in France that the revolutionary regime change after 1789 weakened government authority and led to severe frictions in the population: similar phenomena also took place in the French expatriate communities in the Ottoman Empire. What strategies did French republican government officials use to consolidate their authority in these communities? The answer to this question is especially interesting, because the main phase of the process of power consolidation in the Levant occurred between the summers of 1793 and 1794, which coincided with the Terror in France. This chapter seeks to show that, although starting from the same ideological standpoints as their colleagues in metropolitan France, French administrators in the Ottoman Empire used very different approaches to reaffirm their authority. First, the reasoning behind the differences, and the resulting policies in the French communities, will be studied, taking the French administration's attitude towards the Catholic Church as a case in point. The focus then turns to the strategies employed to overcome schisms among the French republicans of the Levant, by both the local administration and the central government in Paris. Finally, the chapter examines what scope the French administration in the Ottoman Empire may have had to inflict measures of coercion on its population.

TWO STRATEGIES, ONE REVOLUTION: FORCE IN FRANCE, WISDOM IN THE LEVANT

In order to be able to assess the policies of the French administration towards expatriate residents in the Levant, it is first necessary to return, very briefly, to revolutionary politics in France. French revolutionary political discourse in 1793 and 1794 was dominated by the perception that the Republic was in a situation of utmost crisis. As a consequence, the National Convention decided to suspend the Constitution and to govern the country with emergency measures. This unconstitutional regime was termed 'revolutionary government'. In two speeches, delivered at the National Convention on 25 December 1793 and on 5 February 1794, Robespierre explained the goals and the character of this regime. According to

Robespierre, the emergency government had been created to pave the way for constitutional government: 'The aim of the constitutional government is to conserve the republic; that of the revolutionary government is to found it.'¹ The draconian laws of the revolutionary government were, therefore, intended to prepare France for a constitutional and democratic regime. Moreover, they were deemed necessary for the survival of the French Republic, in view of the countless external and internal enemies.² This emergency thus became the justification of terror: 'We must smother the internal and external enemies of the Republic or perish with her; in this situation, the first maxim of your policy ought to be to lead the people by reason and the people's enemies by terror.'³

Who were the internal enemies of the Revolution? Robespierre and his partisans identified two groups of opponents: the so-called 'citras' and 'ultras'. The first group was situated to the political right of the 'true republicans'; they were deemed too indulgent towards internal and external enemies, and therefore became their accomplices (Danton was identified with this faction). The ultras, on the other hand, were the leftist opponents of Robespierre's government. They were deemed too extremist (Hébert was one of the most prominent representatives of this group).⁴ To quote Robespierre's words: 'The internal enemies of the French people are divided into two factions, as if into two army corps . . . One of these factions pushes us towards weakness, the other towards excess . . .'⁵ In our context, it is helpful to examine Robespierre's usage of certain terms a bit more closely. The citras were accused of indulgence, or of *modérantisme*. We should be careful, however, not to identify *modérantisme* with moderation: '[The government] must sail between two rocks, weakness and temerity, *modérantisme* and excess; *modérantisme* is to moderation what impotence is to chastity, and excess resembles energy no more than dropsy resembles health.'⁶

Hence, although Robespierre considered moderation to be a virtue, he clearly regarded *modérantisme* as more dangerous than revolutionary extremism: '[We] have to guard ourselves much less against an excess of energy than against too much weakness: perhaps the greatest pitfall that we have to avoid is not zealous fervour,

¹ 'Convention nationale. Rapport sur les principes du gouvernement révolutionnaire, [pronounced by Robespierre on 25 December 1793]', *Moniteur universel*, No. 97, 27 December 1793.

² Ibid.: 'The revolutionary government owes to the good citizens their full national protection; it owes the enemies of the people nothing but death. These notions suffice to explain the origin and nature of the laws we call revolutionary. Those who call them arbitrary or tyrannical are stupid or perverted sophists who try to confuse opposites; they want to proscribe the same government for peace and war, health and sickness . . .'

³ Robespierre, 'Rapport sur les principes de morale politique qui doivent guider la Convention nationale dans l'administration intérieure de la République', 301. Translation quoted from Bienvenu (ed.), *The Ninth of Thermidor*, 32–49.

⁴ Palmer, *Twelve Who Ruled*, 117, 256–7.

⁵ Robespierre, 'Rapport sur les principes de morale politique qui doivent guider la Convention nationale dans l'administration intérieure de la République', 305.

⁶ 'Convention nationale. Rapport sur les principes du gouvernement révolutionnaire, [pronounced by Robespierre on 25 December 1793]', *Moniteur universel*, No. 97, 27 December 1793.

but rather . . . fright at our own courage.⁷ Furthermore, any questioning of the government's rigorous measures was denounced as counter-revolutionary, and therefore to be persecuted with utmost severity:

All those who interpose their parricidal gentleness to protect the wicked from the avenging blade of national justice are like those who would throw themselves between the tyrants' henchmen and our soldiers' bayonets. All the outbursts of their false sensitivity seem to me only longing sighs for England and Austria.⁸

The terrible consequences of the doctrines of Robespierre and his partisans are well known. The estimated number of victims of the Terror varies between 35,000 and 40,000, not including those who died in the war in the Vendée region.⁹ The apologists of Robespierre and the Committee of Public Safety claim, however, that their policies had saved the Republic by rendering possible the military victory over its enemies and by stabilizing and centralizing the government's authority. Not long after World War I, the eminent Marxist historian Albert Mathiez wrote, for example: 'Revolutionary France would not have accepted the Terror if it had not been convinced that victory was impossible without the suspension of liberties. She resigned herself to the dictatorship of the Convention and the Committees, hoping that her sacrifice would not be useless and she was not disappointed.'¹⁰

Was there a viable alternative for French revolutionaries? Could they have saved the Republic without recourse to the most brutal and cruel coercion? This is a question that can never be fully answered, because alternatives to the policies which historians subsume under the term 'Terror' were not chosen by those in power. Nevertheless, it is possible to hypothesize about more humane ways of consolidating the authority of the French republican government, by analysing instances in which revolutionary destabilization of government authority was overcome in different ways.

In some respects, the French expatriate communities in the Levant can be considered to be such an instance. Of course, the living conditions of a few hundred French citizens, dispersed in small communities over several Ottoman cities, were decidedly different from those of their compatriots in metropolitan France (although we should also not underestimate the differences of living conditions within France). Nevertheless, the same revolution affected the French in France and the French in the Ottoman Empire. Both groups shared the same discursive universe, corresponding intensively with each other, reading the same newspapers, and discussing the same political issues. This shared sphere of intellectual exchange notwithstanding, French government officials could not enforce the same policies in the Levant as they did in France. The fact that their authority depended, to a large degree, on the Ottoman government's benevolence was one reason for this;

⁷ Robespierre, 'Rapport sur les principes de morale politique qui doivent guider la Convention nationale dans l'administration intérieure de la République', 298.

⁸ Ibid., 302. Translation quoted from Bienvenu (ed.), *The Ninth of Thermidor*, 32–49.

⁹ Richard T. Bienvenu, 'Terror, The', in Samuel F. Scott and Barry Rothaus (eds.), *Historical Dictionary of the French Revolution*, 2 vols. (Westport, 1985), vol. 2, 942–6, 945.

¹⁰ Albert Mathiez, *La Révolution française. La Terreur*, 3 vols. (Paris, 1985), vol. 3, 203.

the effortlessness of emigration was another. As Chapter 7 demonstrated, French administrators were heavily criticized and denounced for being too hesitant in changing the political order in the expatriate communities. How could republicans justify this 'timid' policy?

In October 1793, one of the very fervent republicans of Izmir, Joseph Noyane (who will play an important role in this chapter), complained about the local provisional consul, denouncing his '*modérantisme criminel*'.¹¹ Before the schism among the French republicans in the Levant became evident, Descorches had held a high opinion of Noyane. In September, he even suggested his appointment as French consul in Salonica.¹² It can, however, be assumed that by October, Descorches had become suspicious of Noyane. The envoy rebuked the provisional consul of Izmir for not cooperating sufficiently with the local general assemblies and for failing to adhere to the principles of republican administration.¹³ On the other hand, he declared to Noyane that in the Levant and in France there were two different ways of applying the 'regenerating principles' of the French Revolution:

[In] France it is for *force* to ensure the success [of our regenerating principles]. Beyond our borders, under the rule of foreigners and perhaps here more than anywhere else, *it is up to wisdom*. Compromises, mutual concessions, and patience are therefore essential in our position. Yes, citizen, when I was in Poland, I was honoured with the nickname Robespierre by the *modérantistes*; I do not know if in Turkey I will be accused of professing their doctrine, but . . . I will always tell you that the interests of the Republic, here where we are, require of all citizens calm, aplomb, and moderation in their conduct.¹⁴

Descorches never tired of repeating this reasoning. He also used it to justify his conduct to the Jacobin Club of Paris, after he had been denounced;¹⁵ and he used it when he appealed to the civic responsibility of his unruly compatriots: 'Above all, the public interest requires of us calm and union here.'¹⁶ In practice, this policy led to a great degree of tolerance towards people who, in metropolitan France, would have had to fear persecution. Most merchants in Istanbul had signed, on 7 October 1792, a counter-revolutionary document in which they declared themselves loyal subjects of the French king (see Chapters 1 and 7). In France, the chances of avoiding punishment for such a treacherous act would have been minimal. However, when Citizen Florenville reproached the French envoy for cooperating with counter-revolutionaries, Descorches simply claimed that he would consider the merchants to be loyal citizens as long as they were not put to trial: '[You] can consider in your personal opinion such and such individuals to be counter-revolutionaries, but neither you nor I can be judges of such a fact. As long as

¹¹ Noyane to Descorches, 17 October 1793, MAE, CP Turquie 186, fol. 124.

¹² Descorches to Foreign Minister, 1 September 1793, MAE, CP Turquie 185, fol. 290.

¹³ Descorches to Dauphin, 23 October 1793, MAE, CP Turquie 186, fols. 127–9.

¹⁴ Descorches to Noyane, 23 October 1793, MAE, CP Turquie 186, fol. 124. Emphases in original, except for *modérantistes*.

¹⁵ Descorches to Jacobin Club of Paris, 21 November 1793, MAE, CP Turquie 186, fol. 328.

¹⁶ Descorches to Florenville, 20 April 1794, MAE, CP Turquie 187, fol. 410.

they are not actually . . . put to trial, they are our *concitoyens*. They retain all their civil rights.¹⁷

Astonishingly, Descorches's truly indulgent approach received the approval of his government, both during and after the Terror. Even shortly before the beginning of the so-called Great Terror, the French government supported the moderate approach practised in Istanbul: '[We] do not conceal [the fact] that patriotism can and should be manifested in different ways in Constantinople and in Paris; there, one may use conciliation where we would use firmness . . .'¹⁸ Descorches's successor Verninac was likewise instructed to continue Descorches's policy towards the French merchants:

What is important is that the French merchants who are established at the *échelles* remain loyal to their country [*patrie*]. We should not scrutinize their opinions with an inquisitorial rigour *and demand that patriotism in Constantinople or Aleppo manifests itself in the same way as in Paris or Marseille*. Even vacillations or past errors must be excused or forgotten . . . It is a question of prudence, restraint, and conciliation, and not of affected demonstrations of an ardent patriotism, so entirely inappropriate in such a distant country, which is so different from our manners and our customs.¹⁹

With regard to government agents, too, the French envoy seems to have put much more emphasis on loyalty than on political conformity. We can see this from Descorches's attitude towards his dragoman Dantan, the only interpreter of the French legation who had not defected from his post in 1793. Dantan was clearly suspect, as he had resisted wearing the cockade, he was still close to his defected former dragoman colleagues, and his wife was openly hostile to the new regime.²⁰ Nevertheless, the French envoy appreciated him as a valuable member of his administration and excused his politically incorrect comportment as naivety:

Dantan remained steadfast at his post, as no one can have a heart more pure, a character more straight, and an attachment more true to the Republic. It is true, however, that the spirit of our principles has not entered his head. I even doubt that it ever will. [His brain] is not constituted for this; but therefore also no perverted idea will ever find its way into his mind.²¹

Likewise, the French envoy also requested pensions for French officials under his jurisdiction, who had become unemployable as public agents of the Republic because they were politically unreliable. This was the case, if they had been loyal public servants during the *ancien régime* and had not openly rebelled against the

¹⁷ Descorches to Florenville, 15 April 1794, MAE, CP Turquie 187, fol. 407.

¹⁸ Commissaire of External Relations to Thainville, 4 June 1794, MAE, CP Turquie 188, fol. 85.

¹⁹ Instructions to Verninac, MAE, CP Turquie 189, fols. 187–8. The words in italics, from *and demand to Marseille*, were later crossed out and do not appear in the final draft.

²⁰ Report by Sicard, 16 February 1794, MAE, CP Turquie 187, fol. 91.

²¹ Descorches to Foreign Minister, 14 January 1794, MAE, CP Turquie 186, fol. 507.

new regime. See, for example, Descorches's recommendation for the French agent in Chios, whose age (the envoy admits) is his most laudable trait:

He is an old, very old, servant and we have sworn to honour old age. This is, I think, his most commendable trait . . . [If] we strictly stick to the excellent principle to employ only regenerated subjects, then it will be indispensable for us to ensure that the end of his long career will be free from distress and worries about his subsistence.²²

A PARADOXICAL PROTECTORATE: THE FRENCH STATE AND THE CATHOLIC CHURCH IN THE LEVANT

A similarly indulgent attitude of the French authorities is apparent with regard to Roman Catholic institutions in the Ottoman Empire. Traditionally, the French king claimed for himself the status of protector of the Catholic faith in the Levant, a right that was recognized both by the Sublime Porte and by the Pope.²³ The French Republic, therefore, claimed all church property under French protection as national property, in accordance with the law of 2 November 1789, which had put all religious property at the disposal of the French nation. Furthermore, a decree of 13 February 1790 had dissolved most religious orders.²⁴ In the Levant, however, the new legislation was applied only to a very limited degree. In May 1793, foreign minister Lebrun answered a query of the 'Comité d'alienation' of the National Convention, asking for his opinion on the possibility of selling all religious real estate in the Levant. Lebrun advised against such a step, as it might jeopardize the French religious protectorate over the Roman Catholic faith, to the benefit of Austria and Spain. Moreover, he argued, selling church property might be seen as a proof of the alleged atheism of the French, which could harm their reputation in the Levant to such a degree as to seriously compromise Franco-Ottoman negotiations:

The Turks despise those who profess no religion. The Ottoman people show a frenetic antipathy against those they suspect of atheism. Is it not to be feared that the sale of religious houses would be seen as a proof of the veracity of the charges, brought forward against us by our enemies, that we have no religion anymore? And if this opinion spread among the Turkish people, the Ottoman Porte would not be able to remain our ally.²⁵

Local French officials in the Ottoman Empire shared Lebrun's caution with regard to selling church property. When a new French vice consul arrived at Candia (now Heraklion, Crete) in 1795, he found a deserted Capuchin hospice, of which the French claimed ownership. The vice consul ordered the taking of an inventory and proposed to the French envoy that the house and the church be sold. Descorches, however, recommended leaving things as they were and waiting for a better moment,

²² Descorches to Foreign Minister, 10 April 1794, MAE, CP Turquie 187, fol. 339.

²³ Faivre d'Arcier, *Les Oubliés de la liberté*, 36.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 148.

²⁵ Foreign Minister to Delacroix, 28 May 1793, quoted in Faivre d'Arcier, *Les Oubliés de la liberté*, 148.

in order not to offend anybody's religious sentiments: '[The] greatest value would but poorly compensate for the inconvenience of arming fanaticism against us.'²⁶ As a result, religious estates were sold only in rare cases during the Revolution.²⁷

After the fall of Lebrun's Girondin faction, the religious protectorate was no longer emphasized by the agents of the French government. Only ambassador Aubert-Dubayet, following his instructions to reclaim for the French Republic all privileges of the French monarchy, began to call for the explicit recognition of the French ambassador as protector of the Catholic cultus.²⁸ During the tenure of Descorches and Verninac, the protectorate was used only as a claim to the estates inhabited by the Catholic clergy. The actual protection of the Catholic faith and the allegiance of clergymen were of secondary importance.

When, for example, the members of the convent of the Terre Sainte in Cyprus tried to leave French protection in favour of that of Naples, the French consul, Benoit Astier, attempted to prevent it on the grounds that French protection of the convent was stipulated in the capitulations.²⁹ A dispute first arose when the consul demanded a Mass for the 'preservation of the French' in celebration of the recapture of Toulon.³⁰ Astier was even able to obtain the support of the local Ottoman governor, who declared that he was bound to the capitulations and, therefore, could not recognize any official other than the French consul as protector of the convent.³¹ Nevertheless, Descorches decided that the consul should not force 'religious fanatics' to stay under French protection:

My instructions are to let the religious establishments in these countries continue to enjoy the benefits of French protection as long as they demand it. However, if they want to release us, on their own initiative, from the burden of supporting them here, we should consider ourselves only too lucky . . . Moreover, it seems to me contrary to our principles of liberty to force people to live under our protection.³²

However, the French envoy always made it clear that only the clergy were allowed to leave. When asked by the *reis efendi* about the French government's standpoint regarding the religious establishments in the Ottoman Empire, Descorches answered that he would not object to the clergy leaving French protection, so long as no French property was alienated.³³ Consequently, the Ottoman government decided to maintain the status quo with regard to the ownership of ecclesiastical property.³⁴

²⁶ Descorches to Commissaire of External Relations, 8 April 1795, MAE, CP Turquie 190, fol. 403.

²⁷ Faivre d'Arcier, *Les Oubliés de la liberté*, 149. On French protection over Catholic establishments in the Maghreb, see Windler, *La Diplomatie comme expérience de l'autre*, 184–7.

²⁸ Faivre d'Arcier, *Les Oubliés de la liberté*, 150.

²⁹ Astier to Descorches, 3 June 1794, MAE, CP Turquie 188, fol. 67.

³⁰ Ibid., fol. 65.

³¹ Ibid., fol. 68.

³² Descorches to Astier, 9 September 1794, MAE, CP Turquie 188, fol. 69.

³³ Descorches to Commissaire of External Relations, 10 October 1794, MAE, CP Turquie 189, fol. 74.

³⁴ Descorches to Commissaire of External Relations, 9 November 1794, MAE, CP Turquie 189, fol. 223.

A good example of the seemingly conciliatory manner in which French republican officials approached the representatives of the Catholic Church in the Levant (so long as they had not openly professed an inimical attitude towards the Republic) was the marriage of Descorches's secretary Gaudin. Gaudin wanted to marry a local Levantine Catholic woman. It seems that her family would not accept a French civil marriage alone, but insisted that it should be supplemented by a church marriage. Therefore, the French envoy wrote to the Archbishop of Nicomedia (Izmit), to whose diocese Istanbul belonged, trying to obtain an official permission for the marriage, in spite of the fact that the Pope had excommunicated all officials serving the French Republic. In his letter to the archbishop, Descorches pointed out that both he and his secretary were good Catholics and that he had no hostile intentions towards Catholicism in the Levant: 'Let me add that I have orders to continue to provide the ecclesiastic establishments here the same services they have always received from us . . .'³⁵ Nevertheless, the archbishop denied his consent to the marriage. Descorches used the archbishop's refusal of the marriage for propagandistic purposes, by publishing his correspondence in a pamphlet, denouncing the arbitrary and unjust treatment of the good Catholic secretary, asking the reader to decide whether the archbishop or Gaudin had demonstrated a more 'apostolic' attitude.³⁶ Although posing as a good Catholic might have served the French reputation in the Ottoman Empire, in Paris such behaviour required an explanation. Descorches justified his conduct and his letter to the archbishop with the need to adapt to local circumstances:

I hope you will notice from the style of the letter, and without my explicitly saying so, what sacrifices I had to make . . . to the general darkness which still prevails here. Muslims, Armenians, Greeks, Jews, Catholics, they all are superstitious [and] fanatized, because everybody here is profoundly ignorant. To gain some ground against the prejudices, we must work above all towards being heard, and, considering the present state of mind [of these people here], in order to be heard, it is essential to first cater to their weakness.³⁷

In addition to this justification, the French envoy also emphasized that Gaudin's wedding was the first civil marriage in Istanbul, even if his formulation is not devoid of a certain irony: '[The case of] Gaudin shows . . . that for marriage nothing is less indispensable than a priest. His marriage opened our civil register . . .'³⁸

Since exercising direct authority over the religious establishments was considered potentially detrimental to French interests, republican officials tried more than once to incite Ottoman officials to exercise their authority in accordance with French wishes. The precedent for this strategy was probably the dispute over the

³⁵ Descorches to Archbishop of Nicomedia, 30 October 1793, MAE, CP Turquie 186, fol. 238.

³⁶ Pamphlet concerning Gaudin's marriage, MAE, CP Turquie 186, fol. 274. In the end, Gaudin received his church marriage: the chaplain of the Venetian ambassador, who apparently was more inclined towards the French republicans, married the couple in the chapel of the Venetian embassy. See Descorches to Foreign Minister, 25 November 1793, MAE, CP Turquie 186, fol. 348.

³⁷ Descorches to Foreign Minister, 10 November 1793, MAE, CP Turquie 186, fol. 282.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, fol. 285.

convent of St Benoit, on the walls of Galata, which was home to Lazarist missionaries. Fearing that the French might obstruct the practice of their religion, the Lazarists of St Benoit had decided, in January 1793, to put themselves under Austrian protection. The Austrian ambassador eagerly accepted the Lazarists' request and sent his embassy's Janissaries to 'protect' the convent. As a reaction, the French provisional representative appealed to the *reis efendi*, complaining about this illegal usurpation of national property. The Ottoman government ordered the Austrian ambassador to remove his guards, but it also put the priests under its protection and thereby made sure that they could not be expelled from the convent, French demands notwithstanding. The French had to content themselves with raising an inventory of the estate and appointing an administrator for the temporal goods of the convent. However, through their intervention, the Ottomans had confirmed the French 'ownership' of the convent.³⁹

In August 1794, we find another telling example of the strategy of recruiting the Ottoman authorities to take the French side in disputes with ecclesiastics. Consul Henri Mure at Chania (Crete) complained about the insolent behaviour of a 'fanatic' Italian Capuchin friar, who had publicly insulted the French nation. His report gives an interesting insight into how far some French consuls still, in 1794, maintained the habits of the *ancien régime*, such as attending Mass and saluting the French king at the end of Mass on all Catholic high holidays. As the king was now gone, the salute went to the Republic. This, however, did not happen on the day of the Assumption of the Virgin Mary in 1794:

[Usually,] the chaplain . . . had not refused even to invoke the deity for the French Republic; but on 15 August . . . , the day was earmarked for expressing our good wishes to the Republic, for liberty and equality and I acquitted myself with the same zeal that always animates me on such occasions; but the unworthy Capuchin, forgetting all the obligations he owes to the French nation and letting himself be carried away by the fanaticism of his sect, claimed that no one but him was to speak in church, and he began to yell against me, against the French Republic, against liberty and equality, which, he said, were the cause of the destruction of religion and of all the misfortunes of Europe.⁴⁰

As a consequence of this scandal, the consul suspended the remuneration of the friar, which he had hitherto paid regularly. Mure did not dare, however, to expel the Capuchin from the convent. Instead, he requested that Descorches obtain a writ (*ferman*) from the Sublime Porte, exiling the unruly friar from the island. French officials thus tried to counteract their loss of command over the clergy by calling on the Ottoman government.⁴¹

The government in Paris approved of the French envoy's general policy: not to chase the counter-revolutionary clergy from their religious houses, but at the same

³⁹ Antoine Fonton to Foreign Minister, 16 February 1793, MAE, CP Turquie 184, fol. 244; Minutes of an assembly of the French *nation* of Istanbul, 18 January 1793, MAE, CP Turquie 185, fols. 140–2.

⁴⁰ Mure to Descorches, 18 August 1794, CADN, La Canée, Consulat, Série 34, unfoliated.

⁴¹ Ibid.

time to insist that the houses were national property.⁴² The loss of authority of French officials in the expatriate communities, however, sometimes rendered it difficult for them to maintain a tolerant policy towards Catholic ecclesiastics. In September 1793, for example, the local political Club of Aleppo complained to the French envoy about the Lazarist missionaries in their city, who had held a memorial service for the soul of Louis XVI. At a general assembly of the local French residents, the members of the club had proposed withdrawing French protection from the Lazarists and expelling them, but had not been able to convince the majority. Now the club members complained to the French envoy, hoping for Descorches's support in their endeavour to expel the missionaries if they did not swear an oath of allegiance (as had been stipulated by law in France since the enactment of the Civil Constitution of the Clergy in 1790).⁴³ The French envoy could not approve of such a request, however, for two reasons: the Club of Aleppo was counteracting his policy of non-provocation; and it was trying to interfere in what Descorches considered the domain of the French government. A confrontation with the Lazarists was not an internal matter of the local French community—it was a diplomatic affair. Therefore, the envoy replied to the members of the club that he sympathized very much with their patriotic sentiments and agreed with them, but that it was not for a local assembly to decide on the withdrawal of national protection:

[Such a] forfeiture is the domain of the general administration and . . . the citizens' assembly of the *échelle* had absolutely no say here. Moreover, I believe that these very interesting assemblies, which are very useful to form and express a common will, cannot regularly issue binding orders, unless they are provisional and in urgent cases, for matters of the internal policing.

. . . Consider . . . that here we are not in France . . . Here we are thrown onto a foreign soil, under the rule of a government that is not ours, under the weight of prejudices which have profoundly infected the multitude around us. Crucial interests of the Republic are connected to the dispositions of this [Ottoman] government [and] to the actions of this multitude. Patriotism itself therefore commands of us forbearance and sacrifices . . .⁴⁴

For a time, the French envoy hoped he could solve the problem of the hostile ecclesiastics by convincing his government simply to send him a number of constitutional priests, including a bishop, to build up a pro-revolutionary Catholic counter-clergy.⁴⁵ The envoy's call for moderation notwithstanding, the self-declared patriots of Aleppo continued their campaign against the Lazarists. By February 1794, they were successful in convincing the local general assembly to require the French consul general to take a more aggressive stance towards the ecclesiastics, including prohibiting them from collecting the rent for some shops

⁴² 'Note sur les moines d'Alep et de Constantinople', MAE, CP Turquie 186, fols. 545–8.

⁴³ Club of Aleppo to Descorches, 17 September 1793, MAE, CP Turquie 185, fols. 403–5.

⁴⁴ Descorches to Club of Aleppo, 15 October 1793, MAE, CP Turquie 186, fol. 113.

⁴⁵ Descorches to Foreign Minister, 20 October 1793, MAE, CP Turquie 186, fol. 174.

belonging to the convent, which they had sublet to Ottoman tradesmen. These rents were an important part of their income.⁴⁶ The consul, St Marcel, was either unwilling or unable to resist the demands of the general assembly—the Club of Aleppo had already denounced him and he was to emigrate later that year (see Chapter 7). Once again, the club wrote to Descorches, demanding the expulsion of the Lazarists from the convent.⁴⁷ The French envoy could not tolerate this disregard of his authority. Consequently, he immediately nullified all the decisions taken by the assembly in Aleppo.⁴⁸ Writing to the consul in Aleppo, Descorches expressed his regret at being forced to have recourse to disciplinary measures against his fellow citizens.⁴⁹ At the same time, he reprimanded the consul for not having followed his orders and for tolerating the usurpation of his consular authority by a general assembly: ‘You could certainly not, without becoming infinitely guilty, under any circumstances or for any reason allow your office to become the instrument of individual opinions.’⁵⁰ Descorches warned the members of the Club of Aleppo not to place their private reasoning ahead of the views of the republican government, which he had already communicated to them in his letter of 15 October 1793:

[If you] only endorse your personal opinions, they will give rise to illicit acts, as these [opinions] will bring you into conflict with those of the government . . . I will not stop telling you this, citizens, because it is a fundamental truth, because the interests of the Republic, as well as the individual interests of us living in the Levant, are such that we need great *moderation* [*mesure*] here in all our actions. We must be careful to leave the reins of our zeal in the hands of wisdom . . . Aleppo is not the place where one can judge best what is good for the Republic; without risking being condemned by reason as by law, [the citizens here] cannot believe themselves so unfailingly inspired as to permit themselves to issue acts of administration to which they were not authorized by any public function, let alone acts which were in contradiction to the decisions of government.⁵¹

Once again, the republican envoy had been forced to refuse the demands of those French residents who considered themselves the most loyal supporters of the new regime. The enforcement of his indulgent religious policy rendered him highly suspect to them. Thus it is not surprising that the Club of Aleppo reacted to the envoy’s orders by submitting its correspondence to the National Convention, complaining about Descorches’s ‘error’, ‘induced, without doubt, by malicious people’, and petitioning for a correction of his mistake.⁵²

⁴⁶ St Marcel to Descorches, 21 February 1794, MAE, CP Turquie 187, fol. 109.

⁴⁷ Club of Aleppo to Descorches, 23 February 1794, MAE, CP Turquie 187, fol. 110.

⁴⁸ Ordinance by Descorches, 19 March 1794, MAE, CP Turquie 187, fol. 114.

⁴⁹ Descorches to St Marcel, 17 March 1794, MAE, CP Turquie 187, fol. 111.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ Descorches to Club of Aleppo, 17 March 1794, MAE, CP Turquie 187, fols. 112–13. Emphasis in original.

⁵² Club of Aleppo to National Convention, 4 June 1794, MAE, CP Turquie 188, fol. 79.

RESORTING TO THE TRIBUNAL OF OPINION: INTERNAL PROPAGANDA

The policy of moderation saved the French expatriate communities from a great number of potential conflicts, especially regarding the Catholic Church and (consequently) the Ottoman authorities. Moreover, it rendered possible the reintegration of those French residents who had hesitated to join the republican cause. On the other hand, however, the French administration's indulgence alienated many of the most fervent supporters of the French Revolution, who saw the discrepancy between revolutionary politics in France and in the Levant simply as the result of treason. This circumstance was highly detrimental to the stabilization of the new French administration's political authority. Of all French residents in the Levant, those who were the most enthusiastic republicans had turned against the republican authorities. How could the French administration overcome this internal dissent? In France, opposition to the ruling revolutionary faction usually ended in violent repression. During the Terror, for example, the National Convention had been repeatedly purged, first of the Girondins, then of the Hébertists and the Dantonists. All went to the guillotine.⁵³ In the Ottoman Empire, however, putting up a guillotine was not an option. Instead, Descorches made use of the same method he was using to convince the Ottomans of his cause: propaganda.

Descorches defended himself in two ways against the denunciations with which he was confronted. He wrote to the Jacobin Club in Paris, demanding that a committee of the club should investigate the allegations in cooperation with the Committee of Public Safety and the foreign ministry.⁵⁴ In Istanbul, he made use of the printing press, publishing an open letter to his fellow citizens in the Levant. In this letter he expressed his willingness to answer any complaints about his conduct. He suggested that those citizens to whom his conduct seemed culpable or suspect should present their accusations, and he would have them printed together with his answers, so that both could be judged at the 'tribunal of opinion'.⁵⁵ Descorches declared that he was not opposed to denunciations. Nevertheless, he demanded that all accusations had to be discussed openly, so that either the culpable official or the scheming accuser could be punished, or, if both sides had acted with good intentions, the misunderstandings could be eliminated.⁵⁶

Meanwhile, the anti-French diplomats sought to exploit the dissent among the French republicans for their own purposes. At the beginning of 1794, Citizen Hénin reported to the foreign minister the rumour that Descorches was having secret meetings with the Austrian ambassador to prepare his flight to Austria.⁵⁷ One may suspect that this slander originated from the Austrian embassy itself.

⁵³ On the continuing purges, also after 9 Thermidor, see Mette Harder, 'A Second Terror: The Purges of French Revolutionary Legislators after Thermidor', *French Historical Studies*, 38(1) (2015), 33–60.

⁵⁴ Descorches to Jacobin Club of Paris, 21 November 1793, MAE, CP Turquie 186, fol. 328.

⁵⁵ 'Marie Descorches à ses concitoyens dans le Levant', 2 January 1794, MAE, CP Turquie 186, fol. 437.

⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁷ Hénin to Foreign Minister, 1 January 1794, MAE, CP Turquie 186, fol. 459.

Hénin, on the other hand, actually did meet with an enemy official—the secretary of the Russian ambassador—who assured him that Descorches had contacts with the Russian legation.⁵⁸ The Austrian ambassador went a step further, by using the intelligence supplied by his spy Maret for a well-conceived intrigue: at his instigation, a royalist wrote anonymous denunciations against the French envoy and passed them on to Hénin.⁵⁹ The accompanying letter, addressing Hénin as ‘citizen, brother, and friend’, stated that: ‘I have read, but not without indignation, the pamphlet which the traitor and hypocrite Descorches had the boldness to address to his fellow citizens.’ The author invited Hénin to print his anonymous denunciations: ‘My zeal dictated them to me; it is up to your [zeal] to distribute them here and in the *échelles*, so that the poisonous writings of Descorches will be followed by their antidote.’⁶⁰ The anonymous denunciation letter was entitled ‘A sans-culotte to Marie Descorches’. Its author positioned his argument very skilfully, playing with Descorches’s professed preference of wisdom over force. He condemned the French envoy’s internal policies as aiming at ‘preserving aristocratic forms’, while adopting the Robespierriest criticism of pro-revolutionary interference into the politics of neutral states and falsely accusing Descorches of trying to alienate the Ottomans by propagating the Revolution among them:

Is it wisdom that induced you to scheme secretly with rayas [i.e. non-Muslim Ottoman subjects] and Turks to make them hate and not cherish our regenerating principles, by the culpable precipitation with which you have sought to spread them in this country where you are? Have you been sent to upset the capital of the Turks? Certainly not. So what is the point of distributing tricolour cockades to Muslims, Greeks, Armenians, and even Jews? . . . Your mission was to win the benevolence of the government and not to alarm the people . . . Tremble! If ever the French come to be expelled, if ever the Turks come to ally themselves against the Republic, then you are to blame for it.⁶¹

At this point, when the French envoy had been denounced in Paris, when he faced strong opposition in the expatriate communities, and when it had even become possible for foreign diplomats to join the internal machinations against him, his tenure had probably reached its most critical moment. His French monarchist counterpart Chalgrin observed: ‘For the past fortnight Descorches

⁵⁸ In his report to the foreign minister about this meeting, Hénin states that his Russian interlocutor had told him about the incompetence of Descorches and that the French envoy had both ‘direct and indirect’ relations with the Russian ambassador. Apparently, the Russian secretary told Hénin exactly what he wanted to hear and Hénin seemingly did not want to realize that it was in the Russian interest to discredit the French envoy. Later, the Russian ambassador suggested meeting Hénin, but Hénin rejected this offer. See Report by Hénin about his meeting with the secretary of the Russian embassy, 6 January 1794, MAE, CP Turquie 186, fol. 470; Hénin to Foreign Minister, 26 January 1794, MAE, CP Turquie 187, fol. 37.

⁵⁹ Herbert to Thugut, 10 January 1794, HHStA, Türkei II, 106, January–March, fol. 23. The Austrian ambassador obviously took pleasure in underlining the irony that the most ‘exalted’ republicans were now discrediting the French envoy with letters written by one of the most determined French royalists he knew.

⁶⁰ Anonymous to Hénin, 15 January 1794, HHStA, Türkei II, 106, January–March, fol. 118.

⁶¹ Anonymous letter accusing Descorches, 15 January 1794, HHStA, Türkei II, 106, January–March, fol. 117.

was excessively agitated. He can no longer flatter himself of having the confidence of the Convention, which rejects and ridicules him.'⁶² The Austrian ambassador was even surprised that the French envoy had not yet contacted him to negotiate his emigration:

I must confess to your Excellency that so far I cannot untangle the true plan of Descorches; he is too intelligent not to realize that if the Republic prevails in France, he will be guillotined, and if the monarchy is restored, he will be exempted from the general amnesty for the role he has played since the Revolution. I was therefore expecting he would open a secret channel of communication with me and prepare the means to obtain my support in case of distress; this situation would have undoubtedly been very useful for the imperial court, because of my influence on the actions of Descorches and because of the exact information I would have obtained of the plans, views, and manoeuvres of the Turks. But this goal is completely missed by the conduct he pursues and by the distance he maintains from me as from the other Coalition ministers. This very subtle intriguer must therefore have assured himself of other means against the calamities he has to apprehend.⁶³

Herbert furthermore speculated that Descorches had already made arrangements for entering into Ottoman service.⁶⁴ The Austrian ambassador misjudged his French colleague. The envoy's plan was not to defect to any other side, but to stay in power. His pamphlet and his appeal to a tribunal of opinion were crowned with success and put his denunciators on the defensive. Descorches's partisans rallied a lot of support in the French community and organized two well-attended meetings, on 12 and 15 January 1794, at which they decided to send a letter to the National Convention, requesting an immediate decision on the denunciation affair.⁶⁵ A second letter was addressed to all French citizens in the Levant and a third letter to Descorches. This last letter was intended as a reply to the French envoy's pamphlet, dismissing his denunciation and praising his administration:

[We] expressly declare that so far you have marched with a firm step and without deviating on the narrow path of patriotism; and that in your public as in your private conduct you have presented yourself as a good French republican . . . [We] have always heard you preach loyalty to the Republic . . . ; we have always seen you practising the maxims which regenerate us, and following the course charted by our new regime. You made us realize that abrupt and irregular moves are dangerous here . . . ; that [it is] through moderation and wisdom that in these regions we gain respect for the sacred bases of the French Republic, liberty and equality, while our brothers in France must consolidate them with energy and force . . . You fraternized with the sans-culottes, with such frankness and cordiality that only belongs to souls which are truly penetrated by the Revolution's principles, and who appreciate the charms of equality.⁶⁶

⁶² Chalgrin to Flachslanden, 31 December 1793, HHStA, Türkei II, 106, January–March, fol. 24.

⁶³ Herbert to Thugut, 10 January 1794, HHStA, Türkei II, 106, January–March, fol. 19.

⁶⁴ Ibid., fols. 19, 22.

⁶⁵ The letter to the National Convention is dated 15 January 1794. See Minutes of the meetings in support of Descorches, on 12 and 15 January 1794, MAE, CP Turquie 186, fol. 518.

⁶⁶ 'Les Républicains français de Constantinople à leur concitoyen Marie Descorches', 15 January 1794, MAE, CP Turquie 186, fol. 521. The letters in favour of Descorches were printed, circulated,

All the letters were printed in a pamphlet for wider circulation.⁶⁷ One hundred and one French citizens signed these letters in support of Descorches, although, according to Hénin and his partisans, over one-third of the signatories were not permanent residents, but seamen who had arrived in Istanbul a few weeks earlier and for whom Descorches was providing. Most of the other signatories were described as politically unreliable.⁶⁸ Owing to the war and the subsequent breakdown of French sea trade, a great number of French trading ships were sold off to Ottoman merchants. The coastal shipping (*cabotage*) between the different commercial centres in the Levant, in which French merchants had held a leading position before the Revolutionary Wars, was nearly annihilated.⁶⁹ A document of the French legation's chancellery from May 1794 lists fifteen ships that had been sold recently.⁷⁰ Another sixteen ships were sold at the end of 1794.⁷¹ French crews often decided to leave their ships when they were sold, and as a result, a relatively large number of seamen had been temporarily 'stranded' in Istanbul. The French envoy took care of their accommodation and food, which gained him a group of supporters with a 'real sans-culotte' background—a great asset for someone who had been accused of aristocratic machinations, and an opportunity for Descorches to show off an egalitarian attitude.⁷²

In the meantime, two denunciators, Hénin and Chenié, had come out and printed their replies to the French envoy's pamphlet. Both declined to bring forward their accusations against Descorches in public, stating nevertheless that they were ready to give their heads as guaranty for their denunciations—an assurance that they did not tire of repeating time and again in the following months.⁷³ Chenié argued that he would not answer to a tribunal of opinion, but only to the Revolutionary Tribunal in Paris. He thus made use of an argument the French envoy had used with regard to the Club of Aleppo: namely, that local residents were neither able nor entitled to decide on matters of national concern.⁷⁴

and sent to the National Convention, the Committee of Public Safety, and the foreign minister. Apparently, however, this was not done before March 1794. The cover letter to the Committee of Public Safety suggested that the Club of Constantinople and the denunciations against Descorches might be the result of a British (or Coalition) intrigue. See Boyer, Mangin, Gaudin to Committee of Public Safety, 25 Mars 1794, MAE, CP Turquie 187, fols. 246–7.

⁶⁷ Minutes of the meetings in support of Descorches, on 12 and 15 January 1794, MAE, CP Turquie 186, fols. 514–22.

⁶⁸ Hénin et al., Commented list of signatories, 19 January 1794, MAE, CP Turquie 186, fols. 523–4.

⁶⁹ Faivre d'Arcier, *Les Oubliés de la liberté*, 165. According to Faivre d'Arcier, in 1789 about 500 French ships were employed in the *cabotage* in the Eastern Mediterranean. See *ibid.*, 39.

⁷⁰ List of sold merchant ships, 23 May 1794, MAE, CP Turquie 188, fols. 23–4. Descorches, fearing that the funds resulting from the sale of the merchantmen might partly end up in émigré hands, confiscated the money, so that the proprietors could have access to it only with the envoy's authorization. See Descorches to Foreign Minister, 23 May 1794, MAE, CP Turquie 188, fol. 26.

⁷¹ Descorches to Commissaire of External Relations, 12 December 1794, MAE, CP Turquie 189, fol. 352.

⁷² Cf. Chenié to Robespierre, 3 January 1794, MAE, CP Turquie 186, fol. 463. See also Chapter 9.

⁷³ Chenié, in particular, favoured this stylistic device. One of many examples is a letter of April 1794, in which he uses this expression no less than three times. See Chenié to Robespierre, 3 April 1794, MAE, CP Turquie 187, fols. 320–2.

⁷⁴ 'Chénie au citoyen Descorches et à ses concitoyens dans le Levant', 11 January 1794, MAE, CP Turquie 186, fols. 445–6.

Chenié's reply indicates that the envoy's pamphlet was a resounding success, as he alluded to the indignation with which many French residents in Istanbul seem to have met the reports about Descorches's denunciation in Paris.⁷⁵ The other reply, by Hénin, followed a similar reasoning to that of Chenié, emphasizing, however, that accusing the envoy publicly would damage his office, which had to be prevented under all circumstances:

A patriot must respect his minister, as long as he is in office. It would be a crime to publicly attack his reputation, to compromise his credit, and to impair the esteem by which he should be surrounded for the success of his political negotiations. It would be a grave mistake, therefore, my dear citizens, to start a public conflict between Citizen Descorches and his denouncers here . . .⁷⁶

Hénin tried to discourage the partisans of the French envoy from interfering in matters that, he argued, concerned only the central government in Paris, by convoking assemblies and by writing letters of support for Descorches: '[In] Paris, these kinds of certificates of *civisme*, overloaded with insignificant signatures, are of no value . . .' He furthermore threatened that such interventions might later rebound on their initiators.⁷⁷ Nevertheless, Hénin was careful not to publish the anonymous denunciation of the French envoy, urging its author to identify himself, for otherwise the denunciation had to be considered a libel.⁷⁸

The French envoy had chosen the right course when he used the printing press as a means to defend himself against his republican enemies' denunciations, which presented the greatest internal threat to his authority. During the course of 1794, Hénin's faction lost more and more ground. By February 1794, Descorches was of the opinion that his republican enemies' agitations had lost momentum and that he had largely managed to pacify the quarrels in Istanbul.⁷⁹

The French envoy continued to use his control over one of the few printing presses in the Ottoman Empire to raise public support for his policies; for example, when he forced Citizen Florenville into submission over the dispute about the funding of the French administration (see Chapter 7). Fearing that such calling to order of a resolute republican might be turned against him, and presented as an abuse of authority, Descorches published and distributed the complete correspondence concerning his conflict with Florenville, which he sent as a circular to all French communities in the Ottoman Empire.⁸⁰ Officially, the printed twenty-two-page leaflets were intended to enable every French citizen of the Levant to form an

⁷⁵ Ibid., fol. 445.

⁷⁶ 'Hénin à ses concitoyens', 15 January 1794, MAE, CP Turquie 186, fol. 512.

⁷⁷ Ibid., fol. 513. ⁷⁸ Ibid.

⁷⁹ Descorches to Foreign Minister, 25 February 1794, MAE, CP Turquie 187, fol. 137.

⁸⁰ The copy in the foreign ministry's archives was originally addressed to Citizen Hénin. We can therefore suppose that some, if not most, French residents in Istanbul received a personal copy of the circular. Furthermore, Descorches's leaflet contains the following instructions: 'Please spread the news of this letter at the *échelle* where you live [and] then hand it over to the chancellery, so that every citizen can have access to it, examine it, [and] extract from it, at his own discretion [and] any time he deems appropriate.' See Circular letter by Descorches, 25 April 1794, MAE, CP Turquie 187, fol. 454.

independent judgement about whether or not the French envoy had oppressed Florenville:

In recent days, . . . a protestation was . . . submitted against the *violence* committed by the envoy extraordinary of the Republic against a citizen. Citizen myself, I am the first to call on the solicitude of all my fellow citizens regarding this complaint . . . ‘*There is oppression against the social body when a single one of its members is oppressed.*’ Article 34 of the Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen. I therefore owe it to the Republic, to my office, as well as to myself, to fully expose the content and all circumstances of this protestation. There is an error on one side or the other and there is but one efficient remedy for this ill, *light* [*la lumière*].⁸¹

Clearly, the French envoy had learned quickly to govern through public opinion. Propaganda, or, to use Descorches’s words, *la lumière*, was an effective substitute for the lack of coercive powers in bringing the envoy’s opponents into acquiescence. Who would deny that this approach was truly much wiser than the application of brute force?

PARIS TRYING TO CREATE UNITY IN THE LEVANT: THE MISSION OF COMMISSAIRE THAINVILLE

Let us briefly return to the revolutionary government in Paris. By November 1793 at the latest, the foreign ministry became aware of the internal dissent among French republicans in the Levant. The Roubaud affair was the trigger for a number of reports dealing with the French expatriate communities.⁸² The first of these accounts began with a dramatic statement: ‘A war has broken out between Descorches and Hénin. It seems that both are at the head of a faction and the public good suffers.’⁸³ The reports analysed the roles of the two main adversaries and made policy suggestions. Hénin’s conduct was the main target of criticism. Although there was no doubt about his patriotism, he clearly opposed Descorches out of personal interest.⁸⁴ After scrutiny of his letters, the analysis of Hénin’s behaviour became even more unfavourable:

All [his letters] were written to expose Descorches and they all expose Hénin. They show the systematic plan of an intrigue leading in slow gradation to its goal. But chance served Hénin badly . . . [His letters] arrived all at the same time and they revealed only an intrigue that is all the more puerile for being most ordinary.⁸⁵

⁸¹ Ibid. Emphases in original.

⁸² Descorches’ dispatch on the Roubaud affair arrived on 20 November 1793 and the postscript of the first report on ‘Report on Descorches, Hénin and the affair of Citizen Roubeau’ is dated 22 November 1793.

⁸³ ‘Rapport sur Descorches, Hénin, et l’affaire du citoyen Roubeau’, MAE, CP Turquie 186, fol. 331.

⁸⁴ Ibid. Similarly another report, three days later. See ‘Rapport sur les agents employés dans le Levant’, 25 November 1793, MAE, CP Turquie 186, fol. 350.

⁸⁵ ‘Rapport sur les dissensions entre Descorches et Hénin’, 3 December 1793, MAE, CP Turquie 186, fol. 368.

Descorches's conduct and policies were generally approved of, even though the officials of the foreign ministry were well aware of the discrepancy between his administration in the Levant and the policies of the revolutionary government at home: 'One is almost frightened to defend a man who seems to fly the flag of *modérantisme*, so pernicious [and] justly proscribed in France.'⁸⁶ The first report took a similar stance:

To justify Descorches one can, one must, say that we cannot be competent judges of the local situation; . . . Prudence can appear as tepidity, circumspection as perfidy. By a great misfortune, those who accuse him are the most ardent patriots. But in the end, because of the difference of circumstances, the most ardent patriots can be wrong in Constantinople, even if they were a thousand times right in Paris.⁸⁷

Nevertheless, Descorches had become suspect in several regards, in spite of his impeccable reputation.⁸⁸ He had shown too much ambition and seemed to have considered Sémonville more as his rival than as his successor. Moreover, Descorches was an ex-noble and only maintained in office by exception. Would not the fear of being eventually removed hamper his zeal?⁸⁹ Many of those whom Descorches had at first praised as true patriots were now supporters of Hénin. What motives could all these men have to oppose Descorches? And why had the envoy not prevented the punishment of Roubaud?⁹⁰ Finally, 'after so many examples of betrayal, how could one refuse one's attention to the smallest indications and how can those who provide such indications be blamed?'⁹¹

Therefore, in order to find out what was really happening in Istanbul, the foreign ministry suggested that the Committee of Public Safety should send commissaires to the Ottoman capital, to investigate the situation on the ground and to recall Hénin.⁹² This was not an unusual procedure. The government sent commissaires to many diplomatic agents in order to 'enlighten them about the situation of the public spirit' and to update them on the course of the Revolution.⁹³ Within France, representatives on mission—and by extension government commissaires—were essential elements of revolutionary government, who enforced the authority of the centre even in the most remote places.⁹⁴

Yet, the project of sending commissaires to the Levant was severely obstructed by the French government's irresolution and instability in the management of foreign affairs, and was almost aborted completely, notwithstanding the fact that both the foreign ministry and Committee of Public Safety had invested a great deal of time

⁸⁶ Ibid., fol. 369. This report includes a detailed refutation of all accusations brought up against Descorches (fols. 370–4).

⁸⁷ 'Rapport sur Descorches, Hénin, et l'affaire du citoyen Roubeau', MAE, CP Turquie 186, fol. 332.

⁸⁸ Ibid., fol. 331. ⁸⁹ Ibid., fol. 331. ⁹⁰ Ibid., fols. 331–2.

⁹¹ 'Rapport sur les dissensions entre Descorches et Hénin', 3 December 1793, MAE, CP Turquie 186, fol. 375.

⁹² 'Rapport sur les dissensions entre Descorches et Hénin', 3 December 1793, MAE, CP Turquie 186, fol. 376.

⁹³ Degros, 'La Révolution', 315; Windler, *La Diplomatie comme expérience de l'autre*, 381.

⁹⁴ On the representatives on mission, see Michel Biard, *Missionnaires de la République. Les représentants du peuple en mission, 1793–1795* (Paris, 2002).

and energy in devising and preparing elaborate instructions to the commissaires. In fact, everything could have gone quite smoothly. On 16 December 1793, the Committee of Public Safety decreed several measures with a view of 'restoring a perfect union between the French residents in Constantinople, maintaining the hierarchy of power, reorganizing all French settlements in the Levant, and applying to them, as far as possible, the fortunate laws of freedom and equality'.⁹⁵ Commissaires would be sent to Istanbul. Their unofficial mission was to monitor the French envoy's conduct and to investigate the allegations against him. Officially, they were sent as a reinforcement to the French legation's personnel and to 'provide Citizen Descorches with accurate information on the spirit and the current march of the republican revolution, and to instruct him of the nature and views of the new French government'.⁹⁶ As long as the commissaires did not declare him guilty, Descorches was to stay fully in power. Hénin, on the other hand, was recalled.⁹⁷

At first, it was planned to send to Istanbul the requested interpreter Pierre Ruffin, his son-in-law, Jean-Baptiste Lesseps, and one agent of the foreign ministry, named Fourcade.⁹⁸ Everything was prepared for their departure and all instructions were ready to be signed. Nevertheless, the mission never came to pass. A report of early May 1794 explains what had happened: at the end of January 1794, the Committee of Public Safety stopped the mission and ordered the foreign ministry to develop a new plan, as a result of the repeated and ever more violent denunciations against Descorches (probably Ruffin, former interpreter of Louis XVI, and Lesseps, an ex-noble, were not considered reliable enough for such a delicate mission).⁹⁹ With the authorization of the Committee of Public Safety, the foreign ministry replaced Ruffin and Lesseps with two employees of the ministry, Goujon and Thainville.¹⁰⁰ Since time was pressing, Thainville was sent to Istanbul on 25 January 1794, without any detailed instructions—only with orders to announce the arrival of the other two commissaires (Goujon and Fourcade), to observe the situation on the ground, and to hand to Descorches a letter from the foreign minister.¹⁰¹ As a result, when Thainville arrived in Istanbul, on 29 March 1794,¹⁰²

⁹⁵ 'Extrait des registres du Comité de salut public', 16 December 1793, MAE, CP Turquie 186, fol. 425.

⁹⁶ 'Extrait des registres du Comité de salut public', 16 December 1793, MAE, CP Turquie 186, fol. 425.

⁹⁷ Ibid., fol. 426.

⁹⁸ Probably Henry Fourcade, who in 1796 became vice consul in Heraklion (then Candia). See Faivre d'Arcier, *Les Oubliés de la liberté*, 223.

⁹⁹ Report to the Committee of Public Safety about the legation in Istanbul, 5 May 1794, MAE, CP Turquie 187, fol. 493.

¹⁰⁰ On Jean-Marie-Claude-Alexandre Goujon, see Masson, *Le Département des affaires étrangères pendant la Révolution*, 311–12.

¹⁰¹ In this letter, the foreign minister excused his long silence with the French government's need to focus on the war effort and promised Descorches that from now on he would get all the necessary support he needed to bring his negotiations to success. Therefore, Thainville (whose name was not even spelled correctly) had been sent to assist him and to inform him about the views of the government. See Foreign Minister to Descorches, 24 January 1794, CADN, Constantinople, Ambassade, Série B1, unfoliated.

¹⁰² Descorches to Foreign Minister, 29 March 1794, MAE, CP Turquie 187, fol. 277.

having caused what was probably the greatest wave of emigration of the whole Revolution in the Levant, there was not much for him to do except to observe and to wait for further instructions.¹⁰³

After having sent Thainville off to Istanbul, the foreign ministry, in cooperation with the Committee of Public Safety, worked out a detailed master plan for the re-establishment of full government authority in the French communities in the Levant and for the assessment of the conduct of French officials. Goujon and Fourcade were to follow Thainville to investigate with him whether Descorches could be entrusted with his post, or had to be removed. In the latter case, Goujon was to replace him.¹⁰⁴ The government explicitly forbade the three agents to interfere in Descorches's diplomatic negotiations as long as he was deemed reliable, and they were instructed to subordinate themselves to Descorches.¹⁰⁵ The agents were to be furnished with 1 million livres in cash and in letters of exchange. It was planned to hand out to them two sets of credential letters: if Descorches had to be replaced, they would present to the Sublime Porte credential letters declaring Goujon as the new French envoy. If Descorches was acquitted, Goujon was to become his deputy.¹⁰⁶ The French envoy would receive a set of new credentials, confirming his official status and demanding his official recognition by the Ottoman government. The French government had also prepared two sets of instructions for the commissaires: one official set, which they would present to Descorches, and one secret set, which contained the detailed procedures to be followed in the assessment and eventual replacement of the French envoy.¹⁰⁷

The secret instructions explained at length how to find out if Descorches had become a traitor. One of the proposed measures was, for example, to ask the Ottoman *kapudan paşa* if he was content with the French envoy's conduct. If the *kapudan paşa* was satisfied with Descorches, this could be regarded as a 'decisive proof of his fidelity', as it was assumed that the pasha was decidedly pro-French.¹⁰⁸ Twelve days after Goujon's and Foucarde's arrival in Istanbul, the three agents were expected to convene together and to discuss their observations. If their assessment of Descorches's conduct was unanimous, they were ordered to act accordingly. If they differed in their opinions, they were to adjourn for a second meeting a few days later, after which the commissaires were to act according to the verdict of the majority and either remove Descorches or confirm him in office.¹⁰⁹

¹⁰³ Thainville to Foreign Minister, 10 April 1794, MAE, CP Turquie 187, 356.

¹⁰⁴ 'Projet d'instructions secrètes pour les citoyens Goujon et Fourcade', MAE, CP Turquie 187, fol. 199.

¹⁰⁵ 'Projet de mémoire pour servir d'instructions aux agents allant à Constantinople', 24 February 1794, MAE, CP Turquie 187, fol. 130.

¹⁰⁶ Draft decree of the Committee of Public Safety, MAE, CP Turquie 187, fol. 186.

¹⁰⁷ Report to the Committee of Public Safety about the legation in Istanbul, 5 May 1794, MAE, CP Turquie 187, fol. 493: 'On rédigea en conséquence des instructions doubles, pouvoirs doubles, des lettres de créance doubles.'

¹⁰⁸ 'Projet d'instructions secrètes pour les citoyens Goujon et Foucade', MAE, CP Turquie 187, fol. 201.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, fol. 201.

All the detailed planning notwithstanding, at the end of March 1794, the project of sending Goujon and Fourcade to Istanbul was suddenly put on hold.¹¹⁰ The most probable cause for this sudden change was the Committee of Public Safety's crackdown on the foreign ministry. On 1 April 1794 the ruling Committee decided to replace all ministries by so-called 'executive commissions', to be tied even more closely to the Committee than the ministries had been. In late March, Robespierre and his partisans had succeeded in eliminating the last bits of opposition to the political right (Danton) and to the left (Hébert). Foreign Minister Deforgues was put under arrest, on 2 April 1794, because he had close relations with Danton. For a few days, Goujon was appointed interim head of foreign relations, followed (for a few days) by a Citizen Herman, and then, on 9 April 1794, by Buchot.¹¹¹ The Committee ordered the new Commission of External Relations to suspend any correspondence with Istanbul until further notice.¹¹² The head of the executive commission was expected not to take any initiatives, but to remain fully passive until receiving orders from the Committee of Public Safety. His job was to prepare and to submit reports to the ruling Committee, and to execute its orders.¹¹³ Therefore, the Commission of External Relations had to wait for the Committee of Public Safety to decide on the further course of action: 'We are waiting for orders from the Committee, either to proceed based on what has already been decided, or to operate on the basis of new decisions.'¹¹⁴

Meanwhile, Thainville was waiting for his instructions and for his colleagues. Originally, it was planned that the other agents for Istanbul would follow Thainville within ten to twenty days. On the twenty-first day, the commissaire wrote that he was still waiting, with the greatest anxiety.¹¹⁵ After forty days, he would write the same. Buchot, the Commissaire of External Relations, was well aware of the awkward position in which Thainville found himself: 'Citizen Thainville, bearer of many promises, with orders to stay absolutely neutral until the arrival of his colleagues, to observe everything and to comment on nothing, will no doubt find himself embarrassed by the long time during which his hopes will not be fulfilled.'¹¹⁶

Therefore, three and a half months after Thainville's departure, Buchot requested the Committee of Public Safety to authorize him to write again to Istanbul. Furthermore, he proposed the definite cancellation of the plan to send three agents with powers to replace Descorches to the Ottoman capital.¹¹⁷ It was not until the

¹¹⁰ Report to the Committee of Public Safety about the legation in Istanbul, 5 May 1794, MAE, CP Turquie 187, fol. 493.

¹¹¹ Masson, *Le Département des affaires étrangères pendant la Révolution*, 311.

¹¹² Commissaire of External Relations to Committee of Public Safety, 16 April 1794, MAE, CP Turquie 187, fol. 387.

¹¹³ *Ibid.*, fol. 387.

¹¹⁴ Report to the Committee of Public Safety about the legation in Istanbul, 5 May 1794, MAE, CP Turquie 187, fol. 495.

¹¹⁵ Thainville to Foreign Minister, 19 April 1794, MAE, CP Turquie 187, fol. 398.

¹¹⁶ Commissaire of External Relations to Committee of Public Safety, 10 May 1794, MAE, CP Turquie 187, fol. 533.

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*, fol. 534.

beginning of June, however, more than four months after Thainville's departure, that Buchot received the authorization to answer his letters.¹¹⁸

Considering the circumstances, it is fascinating that Thainville's unfortunate mission had any effect at all on the political situation in the French expatriate communities. Nevertheless, there is evidence suggesting that the mere presence of a commissaire, who without any doubt was fully legitimized by the revolutionary government, helped in stabilizing the authority of the French administration. The fact that Thainville was of non-noble origin and a Jacobin from the start certainly earned him respect.¹¹⁹ As soon as the commissaire arrived in the Ottoman capital, both republican factions tried to win his favour.¹²⁰ Thainville tried to get in contact with both sides in order to form a judgement on them.¹²¹ However, ten days after his arrival, Hénin was already criticizing the commissaire for showing a predilection towards the local 'aristocrats' and for spending too much time with members of Descorches's faction.¹²² Thainville, on the other hand, had a rather positive impression of Descorches.¹²³ This tendency increased over the following weeks: his relationship with Descorches became closer, while that with Hénin deteriorated. By June 1794, Hénin accused Thainville of being suspect for spending too much time in the company of those whom Hénin had denounced. Thainville defended himself by comparing his political past to that of Hénin. How could an ex-noble such as Hénin, who had made his career under the old government, dare to act as if he was the only real patriot in the Levant?¹²⁴ Furthermore, Thainville accused Hénin of damaging public interest by forming an opposition to Descorches.¹²⁵ The Jacobin Thainville even became a defender of the French envoy's policy of indulgence towards the French merchants in the Levant:

Everyone knows . . . that mercantile speculation has weakened Republican sentiments in man . . . [However,] can men who live 800 leagues away from their country, naturalized, so to speak, in the Levant through their habits . . . , under constant pressure from the

¹¹⁸ Commissaire of External Relations to Thainville, 4 June 1794, MAE, CP Turquie 188, fol. 85.

¹¹⁹ Thainville claimed to have been a member of the Paris Jacobin Club as early as 1789. He was also among the minority around Robespierre who did not leave the club when it split up in the aftermath of the Champ de Mars Massacre, on 17 July 1791. See Chenié to Robespierre, 3 April 1794, MAE, CP Turquie 187, fol. 320. In May 1791, Thainville was listed in a document of the Jacobin Club as 'chef du bureau' of the club's committee of correspondence. See François-Alphonse Aulard (ed.), *La Société des Jacobins. Recueil de documents pour l'histoire du Club des Jacobins de Paris* (Paris, 1889), vol. 1, LXXVIII. By 1792, Thainville had become director of all offices of the committee, a post he left in April, in order to join the foreign ministry. See *ibid.*, vol. 3, 494.

¹²⁰ Hénin's supporters warned Thainville that he had been lodged with a merchant they considered a royalist and they urged him to move immediately to the embassy palace. Thainville had already planned to do so. He waited only until a room was refurbished for him. See Correspondence between Thainville and Chenié, Florenville, Hénin, Comnene, Jannin, and Bertrand, 1–3 April 1794, MAE, CP Turquie 187, fols. 315–18.

¹²¹ Thainville went to see Hénin on the day after his arrival. See Hénin to Foreign Minister, 3 April 1794, MAE, CP Turquie 187, fol. 325.

¹²² Hénin to Foreign Minister, 10 April 1794, MAE, CP Turquie 187, fol. 352; Hénin to Foreign Minister, 12 April 1794, MAE, CP Turquie 187, fol. 367.

¹²³ Thainville to Foreign Minister, 10 April 1794, MAE, CP Turquie 187, 356.

¹²⁴ Thainville to Hénin, 7 June 1794, MAE, CP Turquie 188, fols. 100–4.

¹²⁵ *Ibid.*, fols. 105–6.

horde of our enemies . . . , [can they] be regarded as counter-revolutionaries for having been weak at some point in the Revolution? . . . [I] must also say that the weak only need instruction to become good citizens . . . Let us enlighten and not embitter them. The trade of the Levant is of too great an interest to us, not to try to maintain such important [commercial] establishments for the Republic. Moreover, our political interest also demands of us great restraint in this regard. The Porte would take a most dim view of these establishments if they became disorganized.¹²⁶

By the end of June, Thainville decided that continuing to wait for his government's instructions was more harmful for the public good than acting independently. Consequently, he openly declared himself in favour of Descorches, denouncing Hénin and his supporters as 'nouveaux Hébertistes'.¹²⁷ It was not unusual for French revolutionaries in the Levant to conceptualize their enemies as members of political factions, which were being persecuted in France by the Montagnard regime. In his correspondence with Robespierre, for example, Chenié had denounced Descorches as 'Traitor and Feuillantín'.¹²⁸

Thainville's open support for Descorches was a decisive victory for the French envoy. Thanks to his internal propaganda activities, Descorches had already greatly consolidated his power base. Now that he had the backing of Thainville, the government's commissaire, the self-declared patriots were fully discredited. The confrontation between Hénin's partisans and his enemies escalated during the celebrations of 14 July 1794 at the French embassy, leading to a violent tumult. Allegedly, the cause of the clash was that Citizen Florenville had spoken out against a charitable collection for the poor. This was the straw that broke the camel's back. Previously, the supporters of Descorches, who had had the majority of the French behind them, would probably have kept calm because they could not be sure of Thainville's approval of a confrontation with Hénin. Now that the government's commissaire had spoken out against Hénin and his faction, Descorches's partisans began to intimidate their enemies. If the report of the French royalist agent in Istanbul can be believed, the two quarrelling parties tried to throw each other's leaders out of the hall's windows and into a well outside the building.¹²⁹

A few days after these clashes, Hénin's opponents menaced him to such a degree that he turned to Descorches to ask for protection, to prevent disorder. He feared his expulsion from his lodging in the embassy. A stone had already been thrown through his window.¹³⁰ Descorches replied coldly that Hénin was only harvesting

¹²⁶ *Ibid.*, fols. 106–7.

¹²⁷ Thainville to Commission of External Relations, 25 June 1794, MAE, CP Turquie 188, fol. 193.

¹²⁸ Chenié to Robespierre, 25 November 1793, MAE, CP Turquie 186, fol. 341. Another example is Hénin's complaint about Descorches's secretary: 'Using a disgusting style worthy of the Père Duchesne, Citizen Gaudin [has accused] Citizen Chenié . . . of Hébertism . . .' See Hénin to Descorches, 20 July 1794, MAE, CP Turquie 188, fol. 319.

¹²⁹ Chalgrin to Flachslanden, 26 July 1794, HHStA, Türkei II, 107, July–September, fol. 123.

¹³⁰ Hénin to Descorches, 20 July 1794, MAE, CP Turquie 188, fol. 318.

the indignation he had sown among his compatriots. Hénin's safety at the embassy would therefore entirely depend on his own behaviour.¹³¹

The incident of 14 July 1794 prompted a petition in which 159 Frenchmen asked their envoy to punish the partisans of Hénin, accusing them of trying to incite disunity among the French community 'benefitting from the disorganizing lessons given by the defunct Hébertist clique'.¹³² The petitioners requested Hénin's eviction from his lodging in the embassy and the curtailment of his salary to a minimum. Two of Hénin's partisans were also to be evicted from the Palace. Furthermore, the petitioners demanded that all members of Hénin's faction, including Chénié and Florenville, be excluded from public festivities.¹³³ In a subsequent petition, the French envoy was asked to print and publish the first appeal as well as his response. This subsequent petition is of interest, especially for its aggressive language, which echoes very strongly the rhetoric of the Terror in metropolitan France:

We consider it important that it be publicly known *that in Constantinople, as in France*, justice, virtue, and devotion to the homeland [*patrie*] are the order of the day for the vast majority of French republicans. Intrigue, immorality, and all harmful passions for society agitate and scheme in vain against the public good; *here, as in France*, the perpetrators . . . should know that we have risen against them; that we will fight them with all the power, all the energy of our republican souls; and that we will in the end crush them here just as their fellows have been crushed in France.¹³⁴

Descorches was very willing to print and distribute the petition against his enemy—a petition that may have been his own idea, since it was an excellent propaganda item for his cause. In his reply, Descorches praised the good intentions of the petitioners. He declared the eviction of the accused persons from the embassy, except for Hénin, because he was a government agent. His salary could also not be curtailed. Moreover, Descorches declared that he was not in a position to deny French citizens the right to attend at public festivals. Only the assembled citizens could exclude people from the festivity, if they disturbed the good order.¹³⁵ The petition thus gave the French envoy an opportunity to style himself as arbiter between the justly indignant citizens and the republican agitators around Hénin. The threatening message was understood nevertheless: Hénin, Florenville, and

¹³¹ Descorches to Hénin, 22 July 1794, MAE, CP Turquie 188, fol. 325.

¹³² Petition to Descorches, 24 July 1794, MAE, CP Turquie 188, fol. 387.

¹³³ *Ibid.*, fol. 388.

¹³⁴ Petition to Descorches, 12 August 1794, MAE, CP Turquie 188, fol. 387. Emphases in original, except for the term in brackets. Too many important studies on revolutionary language have been produced in recent decades to cite even the most important ones here. A good starting point would be Keith Michael Baker, 'Political Languages of the French Revolution', in Mark Goldie and Robert Wokler (eds.), *The Cambridge History of Eighteenth-Century Political Thought* (Cambridge, 2006), 626–59. See also Annie Jourdan, 'Les Discours de la terreur à l'époque révolutionnaire (1776–1798). Étude comparative sur une notion ambiguë', *French Historical Studies*, 36 (2013), 51–81.

¹³⁵ Descorches to Petitioners, 25 July 1794, MAE, CP Turquie 188, fol. 388.

Chenié did not dare to attend the next republican festival, on 10 August 1794—for the sake of public tranquillity, as they claimed.¹³⁶

So much did Hénin now fear for his safety that, according to Thainville, he even asked the dragoman of the Sublime Porte whether the Ottoman government would offer protection if the French should attack him. The dragoman's answer was that the envoy of the Republic was in charge of policing the French community. Furthermore, since Descorches was held in high regard by the Ottoman government, Hénin should not count on the protection of the Sublime Porte.¹³⁷ Nevertheless, Hénin refused to leave Istanbul without orders from his government, even though Descorches had enjoined him to board the Ottoman ship that sailed back to France after the riot in front of the Austrian embassy.¹³⁸

COERCION IN THE LEVANT

By summer 1794, Descorches's propaganda effort and Thainville's support for the policies of the French envoy had largely stabilized the French administration's authority in Istanbul. Moreover, the end of the military emergency after the Battle of Fleurus and the subsequent events of 9 Thermidor seem to have revived the revolutionary government's interest in the French communities in the Ottoman Empire. To tighten its grip on the expatriate communities of the Levant, the French government relied on inspections of the communities and surveillance of French officials, as well as on exemplary punishments of those who posed a threat to the authority of the new regime. On 3 Thermidor II (21 July 1794), Buchot proposed sending Thainville to inspect the larger Ottoman port cities—an assignment which he continued to undertake during the tenures of Verninac and Aubert-Dubayet.¹³⁹ This was not the first surveillance mission in the Levant. Mistrust, especially of officials, was an intrinsic feature of the new regime and measures of surveillance and control were the order of the day. French revolutionaries 'were haunted by the lurking spectre of conspiracy'.¹⁴⁰ Already in October 1793, foreign minister Deforgues demanded from Descorches a report on the opinions, character, and conduct of the French residents in the Levant, especially of the French government agents. Untrustworthy officials were to be dismissed:

The Republic cannot and may not maintain officials who do not honestly love her . . . [Keep] in mind that the political opinions of certain men have experienced a

¹³⁶ Hénin, Chénier, Florenville to Descorches, 9 August 1794, MAE, CP Turquie 188, fol. 411.

¹³⁷ Thainville to Commissaire of External Relations, 25 August 1794, MAE, CP Turquie 188, fol. 496.

¹³⁸ Descorches to Hénin, 30 July 1794, MAE, CP Turquie 188, fol. 378; Hénin to Descorches, 1 August 1794, MAE, CP Turquie 188, fol. 380.

¹³⁹ Commissaire of External Relations to Committee of Public Safety, 21 July 1794, MAE, CP Turquie 188, fol. 323. On Thainville's further missions in the Levant, see CADN, Constantinople, Ambassade, Série B7.

¹⁴⁰ Hunt, *Politics, Culture, and Class in the French Revolution*, 39.

great change since 10 August 1792 and 31 May of this year [1793]; so do not judge them only based on the [opinions] they had professed before these dates.¹⁴¹

One simple method of assessing the loyalty of government agents to the new regime was to monitor the regularity of their correspondence and to demand oaths of allegiance. Consuls who did not answer the French envoy's letters, as well as those who antagonized the local Ottoman authorities, were dismissed.¹⁴² Lists were drawn up of those agents who had failed to submit attestations for their loyalty oaths.¹⁴³ However, the mere collection of attestations did not suffice to ensure the reliability of consular officials. A closer examination was necessary. Three months after his arrival in Istanbul, Descorches had proposed inspecting the most important port cities of the Levant himself, and to inform Paris about the exact situation there.¹⁴⁴

Even though this monitoring trip did not come to pass, the French envoy obtained some information from his correspondence with two naturalists, Jean Guillaume Bruguière and Guillaume-Antoine Olivier, who had been sent to the Eastern Mediterranean on a research expedition.¹⁴⁵ The French government had instructed the two naturalists, in addition to their official scientific mission, to supply intelligence on the French officials they encountered:

It is needless to say that [Bruguière and Olivier] will also send most accurate information on how, in the places they will visit, the officials of the Republic fulfil their functions; this is for all the French a sacred duty, which the travellers will accomplish with all the zeal of which they are capable. They will also endeavour to spread the true principles [of the Revolution] among the French who are kept in those distant climes by commerce or any other motive.¹⁴⁶

The two naturalists, who also figured among the founding members of the political club in Istanbul, sent at least one 'political' report. Their account of the French consul in Naxos stated, among other things:

Upon our arrival in Naxos . . . we found Citizen Charles wearing the national cockade and flying every day the tricolour flag. He explained to us his difficult situation . . . [We] have learned since, that the conduct of the consul was equivocal and that his patriotism increased or decreased depending on the good or bad news coming from France.¹⁴⁷

An ambiguous stance with regard to the new republican regime was not unusual among the French consuls in the Ottoman Empire. More than one-third of the

¹⁴¹ Foreign Minister to Descorches, 18 October 1793, CADN, Constantinople, Ambassade, Série B1, unfoliated.

¹⁴² Descorches to Foreign Minister, 14 January 1794, MAE, CP Turquie 186, fol. 508.

¹⁴³ 'Liste des agents . . . dont l'acte de prestation de serment n'est pas encore parvenu', 24 May 1794, MAE, CP Turquie 188, fols. 36–7.

¹⁴⁴ Descorches to Foreign Minister, 1 September 1793, MAE, CP Turquie 185, fol. 292.

¹⁴⁵ Bruguière and Olivier, both renowned zoologists, were sent on a mission to the Middle East, including Egypt and Persia, in late 1792. They returned to France in 1798. See Bruguière and Olivier to Carra St Cyr, 21 April 1798, CADN, Constantinople, Ambassade, Série B3, unfoliated.

¹⁴⁶ Instructions for the expedition of Bruguière and Olivier, CADN, Constantinople, Ambassade, Série B3, unfoliated.

¹⁴⁷ Bruguière and Olivier to Descorches, 10 July 1794, CADN, Constantinople, Ambassade, Série B3, unfoliated.

consuls who had been appointed under the *ancien régime* remained in place under the Republic.¹⁴⁸ Although these government agents owed their position to the king's favour, they were permitted to keep their posts as long as they fulfilled their duties, because it was too difficult to find adequate replacements. This is yet another example of the policy of pragmatic indulgence practised by the French government in the Levant.

Government employees were not the only ones whose political views were scrutinized. The small number of French residents in the Ottoman Empire made it possible to collect information on all individuals. The newly appointed pro-consul Bermond, for example, who was assigned to the Peloponnese region in Greece, produced an extensive summary table of all forty-two male members of the French community (including Ottoman subjects under French protection), who lived in his area of responsibility, listing name, age, place of birth, profession, services provided to the government, character, place of residence, and further observations. Interestingly, Bermond noted down only positive remarks like 'excellent republican', 'good patriot', or 'hard-working'. Negative mentions were apparently left out, which could be interpreted as a further aspect of indulgence towards those who were no supporters of the new regime, but who had decided not to emigrate.¹⁴⁹

Those citizens who were not excellent republicans, but who did not openly rebel against the new regime, could expect to be treated with forbearance during and after the gradual stabilization of republican authority in the Levant in summer 1794. The tone towards the émigrés, however, became increasingly aggressive. In May, shortly after the mass emigrations sparked by Thainville's arrival, Descorches complained that the government had not supported him enough in persecuting (in particular) French officials who had defected from their posts: 'Maybe up to now we have kept silent for too long regarding this kind of perpetrators; . . . such scandalous scenes would be less numerous in the Levant, if the decrees of accusation, which I demanded last August . . . , had been issued.'¹⁵⁰

When the government in Paris broke its long silence towards its envoy in Istanbul, the émigrés were one of the few issues on which Buchot could give Descorches clear instructions: the French envoy was to make sure that they could not escape from national vengeance. Therefore, the French government wanted Descorches to make an example of the former chancellor Pierre Fonton, by having him extradited from the Sublime Porte in order to be put on trial in France.¹⁵¹ Furthermore, the French authorities were to observe three principles with regard to those who had emigrated: émigrés were permanently banished from French territory; they were to be considered legally dead; and all their property was to

¹⁴⁸ Faivre d'Arcier, *Les Oubliés de la liberté*, 140.

¹⁴⁹ 'Tableau général des français résidants en Morée', August 1794, MAE, CP Turquie 188, fol. 410. It should be noted that the table included not only French residents of the Peloponnese, but those of an area which roughly corresponds with today's mainland Greece without Macedonia.

¹⁵⁰ Descorches to Foreign Minister, 23 May 1794, MAE, CP Turquie 188, fol. 21.

¹⁵¹ Commissaire of External Relations to Descorches, 5 July 1794, MAE, CP Turquie 188, fol. 251. On Fonton, see also Chapter 7.

belong to the Republic. Consequently, Buchot ordered Descorches to supply detailed information on the émigrés' identities, possessions, and domiciles in France, and to forward this information to the departmental authorities in southern France, from where most French expatriates in the Levant originated.¹⁵²

Following these instructions, Descorches requested the extradition of Pierre Fonton from the Sublime Porte, arguing that a French national could not be alienated from French jurisdiction, and ignoring the fact that, after defecting, émigrés ceased to be considered French nationals.¹⁵³ Fonton had passed under Russian protection. Nevertheless, the Sublime Porte at first seemed not to signal an outright rejection of Descorches's request. The first dragoman of the Ottoman government, Callimachi, even asked Descorches for suggestions on how to seize the former chancellor without causing too much scandal: 'May we ask you to inform us how you expect him to be seized, as it is not suitable for the Sublime Porte to have him kidnapped from the middle of the main street [i.e. today's İstiklal Caddesi]?'¹⁵⁴ Descorches suggested abducting Fonton when he went hunting in the countryside. After that, he could be taken to a secret place and thence to France.¹⁵⁵ In the end, however, the Sublime Porte declined to deliver Fonton. His status as Russian protégé saved the former chancellor, despite Descorches's protest that it was against the capitulations to alienate a French national from his 'natural' jurisdiction.¹⁵⁶ The French envoy repeatedly requested the Ottoman government not to acknowledge the change of protection of French émigrés. His argument reveals the helplessness of the French administration with regard to the problem of emigration:

If these traitors to their country want to hide their shame [and] cover their crimes with a foreign coat, then let them go to Russia, Prussia, etc.; but we will never comprehend this contrariness, this political and moral monstrosity of a Frenchman becoming Russian, Prussian, etc., without leaving his house in Galata, in Pera, or in Smyrna [i.e. Izmir] etc. We base ourselves on equity, on evident reason, and finally on the formal text of the capitulations, when we establish that in the states of His Highness no foreign jurisdiction may legitimately stop the exercise of French jurisdiction over any French whomsoever; the Sublime Porte can therefore not—with impartiality, justice, and without impairing one of the principal bases of our political existence in the Ottoman Empire—acknowledge any [non-French] minister's claim whatsoever aiming at this exercise [of jurisdiction over French people].¹⁵⁷

Descorches's attempts to deliver the émigrés to 'national vengeance' were not crowned with success. The Ottoman state shielded émigrés by acknowledging their passing under the protection of a different consular authority. Therefore, in this case too, the French government settled for a policy of moderation, which gave

¹⁵² Commissaire of External Relations to Descorches, 5 July 1794, MAE, CP Turquie 188, fol. 252.

¹⁵³ Descorches to the Sublime Porte, 6 November 1794, MAE, CP Turquie 189, fol. 209.

¹⁵⁴ Callimachi to Descorches, around 16 December 1794, MAE, CP Turquie 190, fol. 17.

¹⁵⁵ Descorches to Callimachi, 17 December 1794, MAE, CP Turquie 190, fol. 18.

¹⁵⁶ Descorches to Callimachi, 18 January 1795, MAE, CP Turquie 190, fol. 110.

¹⁵⁷ Descorches to Reis Efendi, 20 February 1795, MAE, CP Turquie 190, fol. 234.

priority not to the enforcement of French anti-émigré legislation, but to good relations with the Ottoman government. The instructions to Descorches's successor reveal as much:

As for the French émigrés, the Citizen Verninac will avoid any communication with them and he will call upon the faithful French to follow his example . . . After having fully grasped the spirit of the laws on émigrés, he will investigate to what extent they can be applied—taking into consideration [the legal framework] of the *échelles*, without compromising the relationship with the Turkish government, and without alienating or alarming French commerce in the *échelles*. He will only enforce [the laws on émigrés] in the cases where the right to do so is unquestionably based on the capitulations . . .¹⁵⁸

Now to return to Thainville's tour of inspection, and to the only case of genuine coercion, in connection with the regime change, exercised by the French authorities in the Levant during the years 1792 to 1795. Like his superior in Istanbul, the French provisional consul in Izmir had to deal with cases of republican insubordination. In Izmir, too, the most fervent supporters of the new regime could not accept that they were still governed in line with an *ancien régime* ordinance. In their eyes, this had lost all its legitimacy and was only maintained because those claiming to represent the republican government in the Ottoman Empire were, in fact, counter-revolutionary traitors. All the French envoy's efforts to settle the ensuing disputes were doomed to failure: 'I am sending volumes there: this *échelle* alone gives me more work than all the rest: I am preaching, preaching incessantly; I wear myself out with fraternal exhortations and nothing works. It seems that everything turns into poison on arriving in that atmosphere . . .'¹⁵⁹

Izmir was by far the most important port for French trade in the Levant.¹⁶⁰ Furthermore, the city was the temporary home for about 1,200 French citizens, the greatest number of whom were seamen from merchant ships or from the French navy squadron (see Chapter 2).¹⁶¹ Thainville made two trips to Izmir. First, in September 1794, he tried to get an overview of the circumstances on the ground.¹⁶² Then he returned to Istanbul to confer with Descorches. The situation in Izmir was even more problematic than expected. The radical republicans questioned the legitimacy of the provisional consul. The French navy squadron suffered from severe problems of discipline; since the loss of his flagship, the *Sybille* (see Chapter 2), the authority of the squadron's commander Rondeau had been challenged by some of his officers.¹⁶³ As a result, the French envoy instructed Thainville to strengthen the authority of the French state by preaching unity, fraternity, and

¹⁵⁸ Instructions to Verninac, MAE, CP Turquie 189, fol. 188.

¹⁵⁹ Descorches to Foreign Minister, 12 December 1793, MAE, CP Turquie 186, fol. 416.

¹⁶⁰ Faivre d'Arcier, *Les Oubliés de la liberté*, 93.

¹⁶¹ Thainville to Commissaire of External Relations, 1 September 1794, MAE, CP Turquie 188, fol. 519.

¹⁶² *Ibid.*

¹⁶³ Descorches to Commissaire of External Relations, 9 November 1794, MAE, CP Turquie 189, fol. 223.

obedience to the law among the French citizens of Izmir.¹⁶⁴ Nevertheless, Descorches also advised Thainville to act vigorously, if disobedience among the French citizens persisted:

If you find out about any infringements of the laws and regulations which should govern us in the Levant, you will instruct with fraternal advice the officials or citizens who are guilty of such offences; if it was by mistake then the advice . . . will soon make them disappear; if . . . it was the effect of stubborn blindness or perfidious intentions, then you will give . . . such orders as the case may require . . . for the swiftest, firmest, and the most unalterable suppression and punishment of the crimes . . .¹⁶⁵

The moment for swift and firm suppression came in December 1794. An example was made of one of the most exalted republicans, Joseph Noyane. Previously, Noyane had protested against a petition asking Descorches to prolong the tenure in office of the provisional consul. He thereby insulted the initiator of the petition, who in turn obtained a judgement from the provisional consul requiring Noyane to retract his injurious statements. Noyane declared that he considered the consular court's judgement 'null, non-compulsory, and void'.¹⁶⁶ He thus refused to acknowledge the authority of the provisional consul. Moreover, he threatened to pull the French navy squadron's crews in the harbour of Izmir into this conflict—a provocation that the representatives of the French state could not tolerate.¹⁶⁷ Descorches reacted resolutely and ordered the arrest of Noyane; but not without recurring to his tried and tested method of raising public support by printing and publishing both Noyane's 'seditious' declarations and the subsequent order of arrest:

[It] is impossible not to find Citizen Noyane Jr. guilty, 1. of having carried to extremes, by the way he devised his protestation, the system of . . . degradation and defamation of the authorities which the government had established in the *échelle* of Smyrna; 2. of having by this deed . . . caused anarchy among the French living in the Levant, which is everywhere the most dangerous enemy of liberty and particularly disastrous . . . on the territory of a nation whose esteem and friendship are important for us to preserve . . . ; 3. finally of having given these offences the highest degree of severity by the repeated demand to send extracts of his factious protestations to the crews of the frigates *Rosignol* and *Sardine*, violating thus the most explicit laws . . . ; Consequently, . . . [the *commissaire civil* in the Levant] declares Citizen Noyane Jr. to be accused of the crime of sedition . . . ; He orders . . . 1. the arrest of Citizen Noyane Jr. and his detainment at his house . . . [and] at his own expense . . .¹⁶⁸

¹⁶⁴ Descorches to Thainville, 11 November 1794, MAE, CP Turquie 189, fols. 233–4.

¹⁶⁵ Ibid., fol. 236.

¹⁶⁶ Declaration by Noyane, 19 December 1794, MAE, CP Turquie 190, fol. 97.

¹⁶⁷ Noyane gave three reasons for his refusal to accept the provisional consul's judgement: 1. The provisional consul was prejudiced, because he had a personal interest in the petition asking for his maintenance in office. 2. Noyane had denounced the provisional consul at the National Convention and his charges were so severe, that he could not acknowledge him as the government's representative. 3. The provisional consul had signed a counter-revolutionary declaration in October 1792. Therefore, he could not judge Noyane, who had received an honorary mention by the National Convention for having refused to sign the same declaration. Furthermore, Noyane demanded that the sailors from the French navy ships in Izmir should be informed about his protestation. See *ibid.*

¹⁶⁸ Order of arrest by Descorches, 13 January 1795, MAE, CP Turquie 190, fols. 98–9.

It seems that this time, too, these propagandistic measures did not fail to achieve their purpose. Noyane was arrested on 12 February 1795. If Thainville is to be believed, this 'act of rigour' immediately silenced all other republican dissenters in Izmir.¹⁶⁹

For Noyane, his arrest was the beginning of a long odyssey. He was sent to France to be put on trial for sedition. Since there was no ship available heading directly for a French port, Noyane boarded a ship to Genoa.¹⁷⁰ Upon his arrival in the Italian port, Noyane petitioned the National Convention's representatives on mission to the armies of Italy and the Alps, asking them to send him back to the Levant to be detained there. The representatives granted his petition, unless the government in Paris disagreed.¹⁷¹ Meanwhile, the Committee of Public Safety had resolved that Noyane should be brought to Paris, in order to decide on his case.¹⁷² Alas, Noyane was already on his way back to Istanbul when the orders of the Committee of Public Safety arrived in Italy. Hence, Noyane returned to the Levant. Upon his arrival in the Ottoman capital, Verninac, who in the meantime had replaced Descorches, arrested the unruly citizen once again and requested further instructions from the government.¹⁷³ A few weeks later, he was again on his way to Paris.¹⁷⁴ This time he reached his destination. Noyane's papers were examined and he himself was heard. He was probably lucky that the Terror was over, as well as the fierce persecutions of Jacobins during the Thermidorian Reaction. On 10 April 1796, the Executive Directory declared that it approved of Descorches's policing measure. Nevertheless, considering the good intentions of Noyane, his earlier acts of *civisme*, his youth, and the fact that he had suffered enough for his political errors, the Executive Directory spared Noyane further punishment and allowed him to return to Izmir.¹⁷⁵

CONCLUSION

Thus, in spring 1796, ended the only case of French revolutionary political coercion in the Levant, after about fourteen months of detention and three voyages by sea. The fact that the new French republican consular administration was able to stabilize its authority even without recurrence to coercion or violence, by using propaganda and indulgence towards the undecided, makes the expatriate communities in the Levant an interesting case in point for the persuasiveness of French revolutionary ideology. Since emigration could be achieved almost effortlessly, it

¹⁶⁹ Thainville to Descorches, 17 February 1795, MAE, CP Turquie 190, fol. 213.

¹⁷⁰ Descorches to Commissaire of External Relations, 23 March 1795, MAE, CP Turquie 190, fol. 350.

¹⁷¹ Commission of External Relations to Committee of Public Safety, around June 1795, MAE, CP Turquie 191, fol. 135.

¹⁷² *Ibid.*, fol. 126.

¹⁷³ Verninac to Commissaire of External Relations, 30 September 1795, MAE, CP Turquie 192, fol. 48.

¹⁷⁴ Noyane Senior to Delacroix, 11 January 1796, MAE, CP Turquie 192, fol. 459.

¹⁷⁵ Decision of the Executive Directory, 10 April 1796, MAE, CP Turquie 193, fol. 342.

may be assumed that those people who stayed under French protection did not do so out of fear, and were not outright enemies of the new regime.

On a very different scale, the expatriate communities encountered similar challenges to those of the French state at home: destabilization of governmental authority resulting from the regime change; lack of legitimacy of the new administration; rivalries between different political factions; severe economic problems; the treason of government officials; denunciations; emigration; and the war. The same factors influenced the lives of French citizens both in France and in the Levant. However, in the Levant, a few printed leaflets, the arrival of one commissaire with no clear instructions (but with an aura of governmental legitimacy), and the detention of one unruly revolutionary sufficed to consolidate French consular administration after the regime change, while in France tens of thousands were killed during and after the Terror, allegedly to safeguard the country. Among the most important factors that influenced the different course of the Revolution in France and in the French communities in the Ottoman Empire, was certainly the existence of the Ottoman backup authority that could replace the authority of the French state when necessary.

All the differences with the French metropole notwithstanding, the case of the French communities in the Ottoman Empire is an interesting example when questioning the alleged necessity of the extremely violent policies of the Terror, which nineteenth and early twentieth-century Marxist and socialist historians of the French Revolution argued were the result of circumstances (mainly war and treason).¹⁷⁶ Furthermore, it can also be used to put into perspective the argument of François Furet and others that Terror was already implied in the ideology of 1789.¹⁷⁷ As we have seen, the same French government that was responsible for the Terror at home decided to go a different way in the Levant. Robespierre's Committee of Public Safety sanctioned policies of indulgence and moderation, which at home it would have condemned as perfidious treachery. The Committee did so in order not to alienate the Ottoman government and because it would have been very difficult, if not impossible, to enforce more rigorous policies. Thus, under different circumstances, the very same ideology and even the very same politicians permitted a state of affairs in which, to use Descorches's words, force could give way to wisdom. In this context, it is interesting that both the attempted coercion of the deserting chancellor Fonton and the actual coercion against the republican dissenter Noyane took place after 9 Thermidor.¹⁷⁸

¹⁷⁶ Linton, *Choosing Terror*, 8.

¹⁷⁷ François Furet, 'Terreur', in François Furet and Mona Ozouf (eds.), *Dictionnaire critique de la Révolution française* (Paris, 1988), 156–70, 156. A classical version of this argument can be found in Hippolyte Taine, *Les Origines de la France contemporaine. 2e Partie. La Révolution*, 3 vols., 18th edn (Paris, 1896), vol. 1, 43, 65. For an overview and discussion of the historiography, see Edelstein, 'What Was the Terror?', 459–64; Andress, 'The Course of the Terror'; Andress, *The Terror*, 5.

¹⁷⁸ As Annie Jourdan remarks, the laws of the Thermidorian Convention were not less coercive than before, but they were 'veiled by the gentleness of euphemisms'. See Jourdan, 'Les Discours de la terreur à l'époque révolutionnaire (1776–1798)', 69.

It remains to mention that Hénin and his ally Chenié continued denouncing their enemies in Istanbul, even after they had returned to Paris in 1795. However, since the political climate in France had changed, Hénin and Chenié had to alter their accusations in accordance with the political currents of the Thermidorian period. Now, Descorches and Thainville were no longer indulgent friends of aristocrats. Instead, they became vile Jacobins, 'preaching openly terrorism' and singing a song with the refrain 'vive la guillotine, ô gué, vive la guillotine'.¹⁷⁹

¹⁷⁹ Declaration of Hénin, 30 August 1795, MAE, CP Turquie 191, fols. 350–1.

9

Turning Expatriates into Citizens The Emergence of a New Political Culture in the French Communities of the Levant

This final chapter focuses on a set of phenomena which have been touched upon throughout the book, but not yet thoroughly examined: the emergence of a new political culture in the French expatriate communities in the Ottoman Empire. According to Lynn Hunt, 'the institution of a dramatically new political culture' was the 'chief accomplishment of the French Revolution', as it established 'the mobilizing potential of democratic republicanism and the compelling intensity of revolutionary change. The language of national regeneration, the gestures of equality and fraternity, and the rituals of republicanism were not soon forgotten.'¹

The new political culture developed a previously unheard-of potential for rallying people to the cause of the Revolution, for turning subjects into citizens. Since the possibilities of coercing people into obedience to the new French regime were extremely limited, as the previous chapters have made clear, the French consular authorities were particularly reliant on the persuasive powers of the new political culture to enhance their control over French citizens in the Levant. Propaganda was a central means of persuasion. But rituals, language, symbols, and new political practices also contributed a great deal to the consolidation of the French republican administration's authority in the expatriate communities of the Ottoman Empire. All these elements were used to include all (loyal) French citizens and to exclude those who did not adhere to the new political culture. Before the Revolution, attendance at all political gatherings was restricted to the small merchant elite of each *échelle*.² Now, all male citizens were expected to take part. Female citizens were excluded from political gatherings—a state of affairs that remained unchallenged in the Levant, even while many women were demanding their political rights in France.³ Women were invited only with some reluctance to festivals and non-political gatherings. Nevertheless, at least for male citizens, the festivals emphasized equality. Rank and estate, the social hierarchy that had shaped the *ancien régime* society, were demonstrably removed. Thus, from this point of

¹ Hunt, *Politics, Culture, and Class in the French Revolution*, 15.

² See Chapter 7.

³ However, women did not obtain political emancipation in France either. The Terror brought the suppression of female activism. The existing political clubs for women were outlawed in October 1793. See Hunt, *Politics, Culture, and Class in the French Revolution*, 104; Olwen H. Hufton, *Women and the Limits of Citizenship in the French Revolution* (Toronto, 1992).

view the political culture of the French Revolution was attractive for many: it was highly inclusive.

However, those who did not take part in the general assemblies; who did not publicly swear the oath of allegiance, who refused to take part in the revolutionary festivities, wear the cockade, or drink to the prosperity of the French Republic—those people were not persecuted as they would have been in France, but nevertheless they were excluded from the public life of the community. The new political culture reshaped, and took control of, the French community's social life. A display of loyalty to the new regime was demanded from anyone who wished to take part. This loyalty had to be demonstrated through a number of markers, including language and behaviour. Certainly, the larger French communities in the Levant were most affected by this development; that is why the great majority of examples presented in this study took place in Istanbul. Nevertheless, it is surprising how pervasive the new political culture could be at times, even in the tiniest and remotest French trading posts in the Ottoman provinces.

This chapter focuses on three aspects of this new political culture. First, it looks at the destruction of symbols of the old regime and the introduction of new symbols. Then, it examines the celebration of revolutionary festivals in the Ottoman Empire, and analyses the introduction of the new civil cult of the Supreme Being and the gatherings of the *décadi*. This tenth day of the republican week (*décade*) was meant to replace Sunday as a day of rest. The chapter is mainly about celebrations of the French Revolution, because such festivities offer, to use Lynn Hunt's words, 'critical insights into the meaning of the French Revolution; they show a society in the process of creating itself anew . . . [and are a] fascinating example of the working of revolutionary culture'.⁴

'PURIFIED BY A REPUBLICAN CHISEL': REMOVING THE SYMBOLS OF MONARCHY

The regime change comprised not only the reorganization of the state and of public life, but also the removal and destruction of the symbols of power of the old regime. The razing of the Bastille fortress in Paris is perhaps the most impressive example of this process.⁵ But the protagonists of the French Revolution also attacked much more humble symbols of *ancien régime* authority, such as coats of arms on public buildings or fleur-de-lis decorations. Moreover, language and social practices were not spared from this profound change. Why did French revolutionaries do this? In their eyes, the Bastille, the fleur-de-lis decorations, and countless other objects and actions were symbols referring to the 'master fiction' of the *ancien régime*, the cultural frame that constituted its legitimacy. 'All political authority requires what Clifford Geertz calls a

⁴ Mona Ozouf, *Festivals and the French Revolution* (Cambridge, MA, 1988), ix. Foreword by Lynn Hunt. On revolutionary festivals, see also Rolf Reichardt, *Das Blut der Freiheit. Französische Revolution und demokratische Kultur*, 2nd edn (Frankfurt a. M., 1999), 240–56.

⁵ On the symbolic meaning of the Bastille, see Reichardt, *Das Blut der Freiheit*, 95–7.

“cultural frame” or “master fiction” in which to define itself and make its claims . . . When the French Revolution challenged the political authority of the old regime, it therefore also called into question its cultural frame.⁶ Symbols are signs. They do not convey a clear meaning by themselves, but they represent ideas and concepts.⁷ Their importance lies in this function, as signs referring, for example, to the claim of the French king to be ‘by the grace of God’ the legitimate ruler of France. Therefore, to destroy the symbols of monarchy was to de-legitimize it; and when old symbols were replaced with new ones, a new cultural frame took over:

The symbolic framework of revolution gave the new political culture unity and continuity. The constant references to the new nation, to the community, and to the general will helped bring into being a stronger sense of national purpose . . . Liberty trees, patriotic altars, Jacobin Clubs, and electoral procedures were established in nearly identical fashion everywhere [including the Levant]. This symbolic framework did not so much reflect already-present feelings of nationalism or the democratic strivings of the masses as it created them.⁸

The French envoy’s early request to his government, in the summer of 1793, in which he asked for permission to remove the portraits of former ambassadors and other symbols of ‘feudality’ from the French embassy, and to replace them with a tableau of the rights of man and a monument to liberty, should be seen in this context.⁹ However, many royal inscriptions and symbols were long left untouched. Because the Republic was not officially recognized by the Sublime Porte, the ‘French palace’ was officially under Ottoman protection, and enemy ambassadors were ready to complain about any misbehaviour of the French. The French envoy was not willing to encumber his alliance negotiations with disputes over the decoration of the embassy building or the inscriptions on the embassy’s chapel door—a policy that, of course, earned heavy criticism from the ultra-republican opposition. Only at the end of August 1794 did the French envoy believe his position sufficiently stabilized that he could order the removal of the royal coat of arms from the gate that controlled access to the embassy from the main street (today’s İstiklal Caddesi). In order not to cause too much sensation, the operation took place between eleven o’clock and midnight:

Descorches . . . had recommended proceeding with prudence and above all with the least possible noise. Yet this could not go ahead without the neighbourhood being woken up by the laborious efforts and the use of hammers to which the locksmiths had recourse to detach the crown, the crest, and the iron fleur-de-lis between the bars which traverse and outline the gate of the same metal. The Turkish guard passed at this moment . . . ; they stopped, became spectators of this criminal action, and allowed it to happen. The Porte was informed about this beforehand; there is no doubt about it . . .¹⁰

⁶ Hunt, *Politics, Culture, and Class in the French Revolution*, 87–8.

⁷ Hall, ‘Introduction’, 5.

⁸ Hunt, *Politics, Culture, and Class in the French Revolution*, 123.

⁹ Commission of External Relations List of Descorches’ demands, around May 1794, MAE, CP Turquie 187, fol. 107.

¹⁰ Chalgrin to Flachslanden, 10 September 1794, HHStA, Türkei II, 107, July–September, fol. 383.

The French monarchist representative Chalgrin described thus the removal of the royal coat of arms. He also reported that Descorches had sent the removed emblem to Paris as a token of his zeal. In the aftermath, the fleur-de-lis ornamentations of the embassy palace were also vandalized, or—as the French revolutionaries would have it—‘purified by a republican chisel’.¹¹ The fact that the Ottoman authorities did nothing to prevent the purging of symbols was seen as a sign that the Sublime Porte was de facto recognizing the French Republic.¹² At first, however, though the Ottoman government tolerated the removal of the old coat of arms from the embassy gate, they did not allow the French to install a new republican ensign in its place.¹³ This policy only changed shortly before the official recognition of the French Republic. After repeated interventions by the Austrian and Prussian ministers, the *reis efendi* declared ‘that cockades, and coats of arms, and other signs employed by the Christian nations, were marks of distinction unlawful in Turkey, that these could not be considered as having any meaning in this country, [and] that the Porte could not with propriety take any notice of them . . .’¹⁴ Symbols do not communicate a clear meaning by themselves, and the Ottoman government chose not to enquire into the master fiction to which they were referring.

The day after his official recognition, Descorches’s successor, Verninac, had the new ensign of the Republic installed at the gate of the embassy. According to the Austrian ambassador, Verninac took this event as an opportunity to propagate the ‘seditious ideology’ of the French Revolution:

The day after the notification, [Verninac] flaunted above the gate towards the street, the indecent allegory which serves as coat of arms of the so-called republic and which invites the mob to trample under foot all that is most sacred in the universe; [they installed] at the same time the revolutionary motto in large characters—this death warrant for all those who are decent enough not to want to fraternize with these brigands. Some people were positioned in the street; to explain all this to the Turks and Greeks, adding that that country is fortunate, everybody is free, living in abundance, and without paying any taxes—which everywhere else but here would excite to rebellion a people overburdened with taxes and eating a bad and expensive bread.¹⁵

Soon after his arrival in Istanbul, Verninac had also completed the work of purging the embassy. Even the inscriptions in the embassy’s garden, mentioning one king or another, had to be erased.¹⁶ Now all the vestiges of the French monarchy, which Descorches had not dared to remove, were finally destroyed:

The busts of our kings beginning with Francis I, carried out in stucco, decorated the walls of the hall leading to the throne hall [*salle du dais*]. [Verninac] had them

¹¹ Extract from the registers of the French chancellery, 25 September 1794, MAE, CP Turquie 189, fols. 9–10.

¹² Chalgrin an Flachslanden, 25 September 1794, HHStA, Türkei II, 107, July–September, fol. 447.

¹³ Chalgrin to Flachslanden, 10 March 1795, HHStA, Türkei II, 109, January–March, fol. 268.

¹⁴ Liston to Grenville 10 March 1795, TNA, FO 78/16, fols. 50–1.

¹⁵ Herbert to Thugut, 26 May 1795, HHStA, Türkei II, 109, April–June, fol. 184.

¹⁶ Report on the removal of symbols of the monarchy, 18 April 1795, MAE, CP Turquie 190, fol. 425.

mutilated; in other rooms one could see the portraits of French ambassadors dating from the same epoch; they were torn off and ripped to shreds at his order. He had the throne dismantled and the extremely rich baldachin which covered it was removed. The latter had on top a crown and attributes of royalty of accomplished workmanship, both in its sculpture and its gilding. . . . In one word, . . . the new agent presents himself here at the outset as infinitely more heinous, if this is possible, and certainly more daring than his predecessor.¹⁷

In the other *échelles* of the Levant, French officials had to deal with their own difficulties when removing the vestiges of the *ancien régime*. The new vice consul of the Republic at Arta (today in northern Greece), Paul Tozoni, for example, asked the French envoy in Istanbul to send him the seal of the Republic, a new republican calendar, and a model of the new tricolour flag. Tozoni's predecessor had sold him a flag from the early years of the Revolution which was by now outdated.¹⁸ Furthermore, the vice consul requested his superior's advice on what to do with a portrait of Louis XVI, which his predecessor had left in the consulate.¹⁹

However, it was not only the consul in the Greek province who encountered difficulties in keeping up with the rapid transformations of French revolutionary political culture. Similarly, the French envoy in Istanbul had to accept that he was not always up to date—for example, when Thainville had to clarify that it had become unrepugnant to use the formal 'vous' instead of the informal 'tu' (see Chapter 5). The 'Austrian spy' Maret reported:

Thainville told Descorches that we were not up to date regarding the circumstances of the Revolution and that our *vous*, which we used to address each other, would shock the ears of a true republican and of a brother of the sans-culottes; that in France everyone was currently at *tu* and *toi*[.]²⁰

Descorches immediately changed his language. Maret considered the French envoy's flexibility as a clear sign of his opportunism and slyness.²¹

For Descorches, appearing as an ardent republican through his language and his gestures was of particular importance, since for him, a former marquis, the risk of accusations of aristocratic habitus weighed heavy. Thus, it seems, he compensated for his aristocratic origin with a particularly egalitarian comportment, at least in the opinion of the British and Austrian ambassadors, who both compared Descorches to his successor. Both accounts also reflect the astonishment with which members of the diplomatic elites of Europe reacted to the new republican manners of their French adversaries:

Descorches, who was absent from France at the period of the Revolution, and was anxious to exhibit such proofs of pretended patriotism as might secure to him the possession of his employment and the prospect of future promotion, thought it

¹⁷ Chalgrin to Flachslanden, 24 April 1795, HHStA, Türkei II, 109, April–June, fols. 103–4.

¹⁸ Tozoni to Descorches, 8 October 1794, MAE, CP Turquie 189, fol. 63.

¹⁹ Ibid., fol. 63.

²⁰ Maret to Herbert, 29 March 1794, HHStA, Türkei II, 106, fol. 2. Emphases in original.

²¹ Ibid., fol. 3. Emphases in original.

necessary to signalize himself by an unreserved approval and a zealous imitation of all the extravagance of the popular system . . . In his intercourse with his countrymen he has affected to carry the chimerical theory of equality into literal execution. The man, who under the ancient government of France is said to have been noted for the petulant arrogance of his manners, has during his residence in Turkey admitted the lowest rabble to his table and to his parties and has made the wives of the more opulent citizens solicit as their partners in the dance hairdressers, common sailors, and menial servants.²²

Descorches's successor Verninac, on the other hand, was described as displaying much less disregard for the social distinctions which were so important for men of the old regime. According to the Austrian ambassador Herbert-Rathkeal, Verninac could show more indifference to the French 'sans-culottes' of Istanbul, because he was of non-noble origin:

Although having the same principles as his predecessor, [Verninac] also adopts more decent manners and caresses the rabble far less than the former; this difference certainly derives from the necessity for the former, born noble, to fraternize with the vilest classes in order to erase the stain of his birth, while Verninac, born a commoner and having already given proof of his villainy in France, has no need to humour such insignificant beings as the sans-culottes of Pera and Galata.²³

This perceived difference between the comportment of Verninac and Descorches may have been exaggerated. Ambassador Herbert's spy Maret even went so far as to relate the following (most certainly fictitious) anecdote: 'When a Frenchman came to see Verninac, to tell him that his attachment to the three colours had caused a great disorder in his finances, the minister replied: "My friend, first you have to earn bread for yourself and for your family; [and] then you wear the cockade."' ²⁴ Verninac was certainly not less republican than his predecessor. The difference in style between the two can be explained mainly by the fact that Verninac had left Paris after 9 Thermidor. The Thermidorian period turned away from the glorification of the sans-culottes and of 'righteous cruelty'. This change can be even traced in the style of Verninac's letters: he resumed the use of the formal 'vous' when addressing his superior and he altered the pre-printed letterheads bearing the motto 'liberté, égalité, fraternité ou la mort', crossing out the final three words, which after 9 Thermidor had been denounced as a death threat against those who were not supporting the Terror (see Figure 9.1).²⁵

²² Liston to Grenville, 25 April 1795, TNA, FO 78/16, fols. 93–4.

²³ Herbert to Thugut, 25 April 1795, HHStA, Türkei II, 109, April–June, fol. 66.

²⁴ Informant to Herbert, 23 April 1795, HHStA, Türkei II, 109, April–June, fol. 107.

²⁵ See e.g. Verninac to Commissaire of External Relations, 30 September 1795, MAE, CP Turquie 192, fol. 48. It should be mentioned, however, that Descorches began using pre-printed letterheads only after 9 Thermidor. Therefore, the formula including 'ou la mort (or death)' might have been outdated already by the time the letterheads were printed. On the interpretation of the phrase 'ou la mort', which originally implied the willingness to die (but not necessarily to kill) for the ideals of the Revolution, see Michel Biard, *La Liberté ou la mort. Mourir en député 1792–1795* (Paris, 2015), 12.

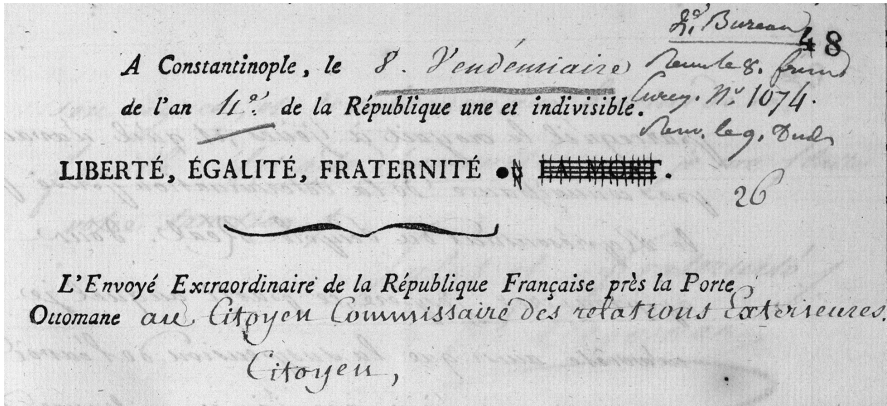


Figure 9.1 The Thermidorian letterhead of the French legation in Istanbul. MAE, CP Turquie 192, fol. 48.

REVOLUTIONARY FESTIVALS: PERFORMING THE FRENCH REVOLUTION IN THE OTTOMAN EMPIRE

It is hardly possible to overestimate the role of revolutionary festivals in the regime change amongst the French expatriate communities of the Levant. Participation in these festivities meant openly displaying one's support of the new regime. 'The ideology of the Revolution became so powerful mainly because it was connected with certain forms of symbolic action.'²⁶ The rituals of the *fête civique* had one chief object: the performative creation of a new regime identity. 'The aim was nothing less than to envision and stage the founding act of the new order in the celebration', to use the words of Barbara Stollberg-Rillinger.²⁷ By taking part in a festival to celebrate the Fall of the Bastille or the execution of Louis XVI, by drinking to the prosperity of the Republic, and by swearing the oath of allegiance, French residents of the Levant had the opportunity to 'perform the regime change'. Such performative acts may have been even more important in the expatriate communities than in France, since legally the new regime in the Levant did not differ so much from the old one (see Chapter 7).

The rituals of the revolutionary festivals enabled French citizens in the Ottoman Empire to feel part of the revolutionary process, all the same. In their everyday lives, they had been excluded from many achievements of the French Revolution, such as the right to elect their legislators. The republican authorities in the Levant tried to curb revolutionary activity, in order not to disturb French trade or relations with

²⁶ Hans-Ulrich Thamer, 'Die Aneignung der Tradition. Destruktion und Konstruktion im Umgang der Französischen Revolution mit Monumenten des Ancien Régime', in Rolf Reichardt, Rüdiger Schmidt, and Hans-Ulrich Thamer (eds.), *Symbolische Politik und politische Zeichensysteme im Zeitalter der Französischen Revolutionen (1789–1848)* (Münster, 2005), 101–11, 101.

²⁷ Stollberg-Rillinger, *Rituale*, 125.

the Ottoman government. Festivals, on the other hand, were occasions where the French residents were alone together (with the exception of a few non-Ottoman sympathizers of the Revolution) and where professing openly one's ardent love for the cause of liberty and equality was not only allowed and encouraged, but also demanded. The festivals certainly created a great deal of peer pressure on the undecided. Attending without declaring oneself in favour of the new regime was impossible. Not attending, on the other hand, was highly suspect and meant excluding oneself from the only non-religious social events of the community.

The first revolutionary festivity in Istanbul, at the beginning of January 1793, did not have a smooth start. Probably the reluctance with which it was greeted can be best explained by the pressure to proclaim allegiance to the new regime openly at such an occasion. Less than three months earlier, the merchants of Istanbul had signed a counter-revolutionary declaration (see Chapter 1). On 1 January 1793, the newly elected secretary of the French community's provisional administration, Emile Gaudin, together with fifty-two other citizens, proposed to organize a civic banquet to celebrate the 'glorious and memorable accomplishments of our brave brothers, the soldiers of liberty'.²⁸ Many of the merchants, who had hesitated to support the new republic, were now apparently fearful that such a public festivity might be used by the more fervent republicans to publicly defame and humiliate them.²⁹ Therefore, the proposers declared that any disturbance of the fraternal union of French citizens would be avenged immediately:

This festival is meant for the sweetest outpourings of fraternity; today, all French citizens are brothers and it suffices to be French to be admitted and to feel that one is among family. If, therefore, any individual permits himself the slightest remark . . . or insult against one of the present citizens, he will be immediately taken away from the society as a false brother and a troublemaker.³⁰

The organizers' assurances notwithstanding, the French merchants of Istanbul refused to support the preparations for the revolutionary festival, arguing that the Ottoman government might consider such an open celebration to be a disturbance of public tranquillity, and thus impose punitive measures. Moreover, the merchants tried to give their decision a binding character, by declaring that they had deliberated on the proposal as 'merchants constituting, according to the current and not hitherto repealed laws, the corps of the French *nation* in Constantinople'.³¹ The definition of who composed the French *nation* (only the merchants, or all male French citizens, as discussed in Chapters 1 and 7), was at this point still in flux and the merchants were still insisting on their corporatist privileges. However, in order not to be looked upon as counter-revolutionaries, the merchant corporation undertook fundraising for the widows and orphans of French soldiers who had died in the ongoing war. To give a proof of their patriotism, they decided to lead

²⁸ Proposal for a Civic Banquet, 1 January 1793, CADN, Constantinople, Ambassade, Série B3, unfoliated.

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Declaration of the French *nation*, 2 January 1793, CADN, Constantinople, Ambassade, Série B3, unfoliated.

the way by donating 1,000 piastres for the charitable collection. Its patriotic purpose notwithstanding, only the merchants and the dragomans of the French legation participated in the fundraising.³² All other French citizens, it seems, boycotted this initiative. Moreover, on 4 January, Gaudin resigned from his office, protesting against rumours that he wanted to use the republican festival as an opportunity to replace Antoine Fonton as the provisional representative of the French community.³³

Apparently, the vigour with which a majority of the French residents demanded the civic banquet forced the merchants to give in. Shortly after resigning from office, Gaudin had reconciled himself with the merchant corporation, and resumed office as secretary of the French legation.³⁴ On 20 January, the French community of Istanbul celebrated the first revolutionary festival and planted the first liberty tree on Ottoman territory.³⁵ This festival was a great success, attended by more than 200 people. According to the provisional principal of the French community, the Austrian ambassador had tried to have the Sublime Porte prohibit the celebrations, but the sultan himself had decided to permit the festival.³⁶ The French in Istanbul believed that the Ottomans were the first monarchy to allow the planting of a liberty tree, a ceremony accompanied by a salute of twenty-one cannon shots from a French ship in the harbour. Furthermore, as noted in Chapter 7, the festival was widely noticed in France and it even became the source of inspiration for the patriotic play *La Constitution à Constantinople*. This first festival was exceptional insofar as it took place at a time when no diplomatic representative authorized by the French government was present in Istanbul. Moreover, it was the only festival celebrated before the execution of Louis XVI, an event which had a considerable influence on the standing of the French communities in the Ottoman Empire. For about a year and a half, until summer 1794, no more festivals took place at the French embassy, because the Ottoman government (under whose protection the embassy building was officially placed) prohibited it.

The next festival, on 14 July 1793, was prepared under the supervision of the republican envoy Descorches. In many respects, this festival served as a model for the festivals to come, especially for those of 1793. The *fête* was organized by a committee of four persons who had been elected by an assembly of sixty citizens.³⁷ The organization of such events thus served, to some degree, to make up for the democratic deficiencies in the administration of the French communities. Festivals

³² Result of the charitable subscription, open between 2 and 9 January 1793, CADN, Constantinople, Ambassade, Série B3, unfoliated.

³³ Declaration of Gaudin, 4 January 1793, CADN, Constantinople, Ambassade, Série B3, unfoliated.

³⁴ Declaration of Gaudin, 5 January 1793, CADN, Constantinople, Ambassade, Série B3, unfoliated.

³⁵ Liberty trees were an omnipresent phenomenon in France. Historians have counted about 60,000 trees all over the country by May 1792. See Hunt, *Politics, Culture, and Class in the French Revolution*, 59. On liberty trees, see also Ozouf, *Festivals and the French Revolution*, 232–61.

³⁶ Fonton to Foreign Minister, 21 January 1793, MAE, CP Turquie 184, fol. 215.

³⁷ 'Procès-verbaux de la célébration du quatorze juillet à Constantinople', MAE, CP Turquie 185, fol. 69.

became a practising ground for democracy. The French revolutionary political culture was fundamentally didactic—and the festivals were excellent opportunities to teach the new political ‘master narrative’ and to put it into practice.³⁸ Here, everything was organized and voted upon according to democratic principles. The assembly discussed the rules of conduct and the programme for the festival.³⁹ The citizens were to gather at eleven o’clock in the morning. The first event of the festivity was the collective oath of all citizens at noon—at the same hour when French republicans all over the globe would swear their allegiance to the Republic.⁴⁰ One hundred and twenty-four French citizens took the oath that day, and fourteen followed soon after.⁴¹ After the civic oath, the citizens attended a banquet financed by the contributions of every participant. The preparatory assembly had decided, after a lively discussion, that women were not permitted to take part in this civic meal on the grounds that, ‘the meal will necessarily give rise to outbursts of patriotism, pronounced, perhaps, in too vigorous and too male a manner that the delicacy of the [female] sex would be, if not injured, at least embarrassed’.⁴²

Female attendance was, in any case, considered no more than an ornament to the festival. Thus, according to the vast majority of the preparatory assembly, women would only distract the male citizens, who should direct all their attention exclusively to the principles of liberty and equality. In order to compensate the female citizens, it was decided to organize a ball after the republican banquet. In the end this ball did not come to pass. The exclusion of female citizens from this and the following revolutionary festivals of 1793 is interesting; in France, the attendance of women at revolutionary festivals was, although never uncontested, quite common.⁴³ Only in 1794 did the exclusion of women end and balls take place. One could speculate as to how far the exclusion of women from the festivals was related to the perceived exclusion of women from the public sphere in the Ottoman Empire, and how far to the fear that women’s participation might give the celebrations a more disorderly appearance.⁴⁴

A further aspect peculiar to the situation in Istanbul was that the organizers had to point out explicitly that nobody would be admitted to the celebration without wearing a cockade.⁴⁵ In France, the wearing of the cockade had been mandatory for male citizens since July 1792.⁴⁶ Among the French in the Levant, this law was implemented only gradually.⁴⁷ As described in Chapter 1, the cockade had become

³⁸ Hunt, *Politics, Culture, and Class in the French Revolution*, 68.

³⁹ Procès-verbaux de la célébration du quatorze juillet à Constantinople’, MAE, CP Turquie 185, fol. 72.

⁴⁰ Ibid., fol. 71.

⁴¹ Ibid., fols. 73–4, 77.

⁴² Ibid., fol. 71.

⁴³ Ozouf, *Festivals and the French Revolution*, 101–2.

⁴⁴ On the changing images of women in republican representation in France, see Lynn Avery Hunt, *The Family Romance of the French Revolution* (London, 2013), 151–60.

⁴⁵ ‘Procès-verbaux de la célébration du quatorze juillet à Constantinople’, MAE, CP Turquie 185, fol. 72.

⁴⁶ Hunt, *Politics, Culture, and Class in the French Revolution*, 59.

⁴⁷ Even in 1796, the French foreign minister considered it necessary to remind his ambassador to attend to the enforcement of the duty to wear the cockade. Delacroix to Aubert-Dubayet, 5 June 1796, CADN, Constantinople, Ambassade, Série B10, unfoliated.

a highly contested symbol in Istanbul. Some ambassadors had tried to persuade the Sublime Porte to forbid its wearing, but the Ottoman government had refused. Some of the French in Istanbul chose to wear the cockade only hidden under their coat, to avoid hostile confrontations with the enemies of the Revolution. The more fervent republicans, in turn, considered this an unpatriotic behaviour.⁴⁸

Since the Sublime Porte banned the celebration of 14 July 1793 from taking place on the premises of the French embassy, the event was moved to the French-owned inn on the main street of Pera (today's İstiklal Caddesi). The choice of location, like the exclusion of women, set a precedent for later festivals. There had been discussions about celebrating 10 August 1793 in the open air in the countryside, like many of their counterparts in France. According to Mona Ozouf:

The festivals' first requirement was the open air. The Federations⁴⁹ were to be celebrated outside the towns, 'under the walls', 'on the open road', 'on the heath', 'in the plain'. When possible, the organizers preferred the wildness and fresh air of open spaces to the familiar intimacies of the village square, in the shadow of the church.⁵⁰

The suggested place for an open-air banquet in Istanbul was Kağıthane or the Sweet Waters (*Eaux Douces*), as the French called it. This beautiful valley, north of the end of the Golden Horn, was a popular pleasure resort for the inhabitants of the Ottoman capital. It was a park and not a wilderness. James Dallaway gave a description of this retreat:

[It] was first laid out about the beginning of [the eighteenth] century by Ahmet III upon a plan communicated by the French ambassador at that time resident. We are surprised to see Fontainebleau transported into Thrace, and instead of the myrtle in the wild luxuriance of nature and odoriferous shrubs without cultivation, to find the sweet waters . . . confined in a straight and narrow channel between a formal avenue of low trees, or forced to tumble over flights of white marble stairs into band-boxes of the same materials.⁵¹

However, the beauty of the Sweet Waters notwithstanding, a majority of the French opted once more for the French inn, which led to great frictions in the republican community.⁵² Not until summer 1794 did the revolutionary festivals return to the premises of the French embassy. This coincided with the general consolidation of republican authority in the French communities and the intensification of Franco-Ottoman negotiations (see Chapters 3 and 8).

The moment of crisis for the new regime in the French communities of the Levant can also be traced in the numbers of participants at the revolutionary festivals (see Table 9.1). Numbers fell to their lowest point exactly at the moment when the French Republic was in greatest danger. With the recapture of Toulon,

⁴⁸ See e.g. a declaration of Hénin, 12 September 1794, MAE, CP Turquie 188, fol. 568.

⁴⁹ *Fédérations* were revolutionary festivities, celebrating the unity of the French people. They occurred after August 1789, soon to appear all over France. They inspired the famous Paris *Fête de la Fédération*, on 14 July 1790.

⁵⁰ Ozouf, *Festivals and the French Revolution*, 127.

⁵¹ Dallaway, *Constantinople Ancient and Modern*, 118.

⁵² 'Relation de la célébration du 10 août, à Constantinople', MAE, CP Turquie 185, fol. 227.

Table 9.1 Revolutionary festivals in Istanbul, except *fêtes décennaires*, in 1793 and 1794.

Date	Occasion	Attendance ⁱ
1 20 January 1793	French victories	200 ⁱⁱ
2 14 July 1793	Bastille Day (14 July 1789)	100 ⁱⁱⁱ
3 10 August 1793	Fall of the monarchy (10 August 1792)	72 ^{iv}
4 20 September 1793	Inauguration of the Republic (21 September 1792)	77 ^v
5 18 February 1794	Recapture of Toulon (18 December 1793)	150 ^{vi}
6 28 June 1794	Inauguration of the new tricolour flag (15 February 1794)	200 ^{vii}
7 14 July 1794	Bastille Day (14 July 1789)	250 ^{viii}
8 10 August 1794	Fall of the monarchy (10 August 1792)	171 ^{ix}
9 20 September 1794	Festival of Opinion	n/a

ⁱ The figures are derived from the respective reports and minutes of the festivals. Most of them are estimates of the authors (1, 2, 5, 6, 7). In one case, the minutes state that the number is derived from a list of participants (8). In two other cases (3, 4), I counted the numbers of signatures on the minutes, assuming that all or nearly all participants signed the minutes. The minutes of 10 August 1793 state that eighty-four persons had originally signed up for the celebration. See 'Relation de la célébration du 10 août, à Constantinople', MAE, CP Turquie 185, fols. 227–8. The members of Hénin's faction did not participate in the end, because they insisted on celebrating in the embassy building. Therefore, the total of seventy-two participants seems highly probable. Furthermore, the minutes of 20 September 1793 state that two commissaires had been especially appointed to collect these signatures. Copies of the minutes were sent to the National Convention and to the commercial authorities in Marseille. See 'Relation de la fête de la République une et indivisible, célébré le 20 septembre 1793 à Constantinople', MAE, CP Turquie 185, fol. 422. It is therefore highly probable that all participants of the festivals tried to sign the minutes, as the signatures served as a proof of their *civisme*.

ⁱⁱ Fonton to Foreign Minister, 21 January 1793, MAE, CP Turquie 184, fol. 215.

ⁱⁱⁱ That day, 120 swore the oath of allegiance and about 100 participated in the banquet. See 'Procès-verbaux de la célébration du quatorze juillet à Constantinople', MAE, CP Turquie 185, fols. 73–4, 76.

^{iv} 'Relation de la célébration du 10 août, à Constantinople', MAE, CP Turquie 185, fol. 229.

^v 'Relation de la fête de la République une et indivisible, célébré le 20 septembre 1793 à Constantinople', MAE, CP Turquie 185, fols. 422–3.

^{vi} Maret to Herbert, 19 February 1794, HHStA, Türkei II, 106, January–March, fol. 275.

^{vii} 'Procès-verbal de la fête de l'inauguration du pavillon républicain dans le port de Constantinople', 28 June 1794, MAE, CP Turquie 188, fol. 216.

^{viii} Thainville to Commissaire of Foreign Relations, 25 July 1794, MAE, CP Turquie 188, fol. 351.

^{ix} 'Verbal de la fête célébrée le tridi 23 Thermidor l'an 2', MAE, CP Turquie 188, fol. 422.

they reached a higher level once again. The peaks of 28 June and 14 July 1794 can be explained by the arrival of large numbers of French seamen (see Chapter 8). This shows how much revolutionary festivals were an indicator for the acceptance of the new political culture of the French Revolution in the expatriate communities.

Another precedent established at the celebrations of 14 July was a fixed list of toasts to be delivered during the banquet, including toasts to the prosperity of the French Republic and to Sultan Selim III (see Table 9.2).⁵³ Added to the lists of toasts of 14 July 1793 was only one occasion-related toast at each of the festivals of 10 August and 20 September. No other toasts were admitted.⁵⁴ The special reverence to Sultan Selim III at the festivals of 1793 was certainly a message to

⁵³ 'Procès-verbaux de la célébration du quatorze juillet à Constantinople', MAE, CP Turquie 185, fol. 76.

⁵⁴ I should mention that it was by mistake that the French in Istanbul celebrated the inauguration of the Republic on 20 September and not on 21 September 1793.

Table 9.2 Toasts, delivered at revolutionary festivals in Istanbul, 1793.ⁱ

	14 July 1793	10 August 1793	20 September 1793
1	To the prosperity of the French Republic.	To the eternal duration of the achievements of the revolution of 10 August.	To the anniversary of the day when the Republic was proclaimed.
2	To the prosperity of Selim III.	To the prosperity of the French Republic.	To the prosperity of the French Republic.
3	To the immortal remembrance of all those who died defending the rights of mankind.	To the prosperity of Selim III.	To the prosperity of Selim III.
4	To the soldiers of the fatherland and to the friends of liberty.	To the immortal remembrance of all those who died defending the rights of mankind.	To the immortal remembrance of all those who died defending the rights of mankind.
5	To the wives and to the mothers of the brave sans-culottes.	To the soldiers of the fatherland and to the friends of liberty.	To the soldiers of the fatherland and to the friends of liberty.
6	To the propagation of enlightenment.	To the wives and to the mothers of the brave sans-culottes.	To the wives and to the mothers of the brave sans-culottes.
7	To universal fraternity.	To the propagation of enlightenment.	To the propagation of enlightenment.
8	To the honour of those Frenchmen who were persecuted in the Levant for their patriotism.	To universal fraternity.	To universal fraternity.
9	To the eternal loathing of traitors and perjurers.	To the honour of those Frenchmen who were persecuted in the Levant for their patriotism.	To the honour of those Frenchmen who were persecuted in the Levant for their patriotism.
10		To the eternal loathing of traitors and perjurers.	To the eternal loathing of traitors and perjurers.

ⁱ See 'Procès-verbaux de la célébration du quatorze juillet à Constantinople', MAE, CP Turquie 185, fol. 76; 'Relation de la célébration du 10 août, à Constantinople', MAE, CP Turquie 185, fol. 229; 'Relation de la fête de la République une et indivisible, célébré le 20 septembre 1793 à Constantinople', MAE, CP Turquie 185, fol. 421.

the French community and to the outside world, contradicting the predominant opinion that French republicans were dangerous rebels, hostile towards every monarch (see Chapter 6). For 1794, I found only two lists of toasts, for the festivals of 28 June and 10 August (see Table 9.3). In both lists, no reference is made to Selim III. The reason could be that by summer 1794, the diplomatic standing of the French at the Sublime Porte had become stable enough to make the explicit profession of good intentions towards the Ottoman state unnecessary.

In general, the lists of 1794 seem to mirror the political developments of France. In 1793, the French in Istanbul drank only to the prosperity of the Republic and

Table 9.3 Toasts, delivered at revolutionary festivals in Istanbul, 1794.ⁱ

28 June 1794	10 August 1794
1 To the happiness and prosperity of the Republic.	To the happiness and prosperity of the Republic.
2 To the happiness and prosperity of the Ottoman Empire.	To the National Convention; may it succeed in its glorious tasks; may it stay at its post until the entire annihilation of the league of tyrants.
3 To the National Convention; may it succeed in its glorious tasks; may it stay at its post until the entire annihilation of the league of tyrants.	To the courageous sans-culottes who fight the despots, cowardly resisting a free, loyal, and generous people, in arms for the holiest causes.
4 To the glory of the tricolour flag; may it be the eternal fear of the tyrants who are in vain joining forces to annihilate it. We swear before the Supreme Being to defend [the flag] to the last drop of our blood.	To the memorable day when the throne, which had already tottered because of a corrupted court, was overthrown by the courage of the brave sans-culottes.
5 To the American people, the first to proclaim the sacred rights of men.	To the memory of those who died on the debris of the throne, defending liberty against the servants of the tyrants.
6 To the courageous sans-culottes who fight the despots of one part of the earth cowardly resisting a free, loyal, and generous people, in arms for the holiest causes.	To the progress of philosophical enlightenment, mother of liberty.
7 To the memorable day when the National Convention solemnly proclaimed that the French people recognized the Supreme Being and the immortality of the soul.	To the American people, the first to proclaim the sacred rights of men.
8 To the great, wise, and vigorous measures deployed by the Committee of Public Safety.	To the wise, great, and vigorous measures deployed by the Committee of Public Safety.
9 To the nations who have not defiled their arms in the evil league of tyrants.	To virtue, to justice, and to courage, the columns of the Republic, which give her stability.
10 To the success of Polish arms.	Deadly hatred to the execrable Pitt and to all of his kind.
11 To the immortal Society of Jacobins, who have unmasked so many traitors, thwarted so many complots, annihilated all the liberticidal factions.	To the swift punishment of the traitors, perjurers and intriguers still hiding under the tricolour banner.
12 To the swift punishment of the traitors, perjurers and intriguers still hiding under the tricolour banner.	To fraternity; may this sentiment, which is so dear to the true republicans, strongly unite all good Frenchmen.
13 To the destruction of the modern Carthage; tremble, English cowards, eternal enemies of free nations; the French people are ready to annihilate you.	
14 To fraternity; may this sentiment, which is so dear to the true republicans, strongly unite all good Frenchmen.	

(continued)

Table 9.3 Continued

	28 June 1794	10 August 1794
15	To the immortal memory of those who died defending the cause of liberty.	
16	To the loathing of the king of Poland, who told the insurgent Poles: 'Do not trust the Jacobin maxims.'	

ⁱ See 'Procès-verbal de la fête de l'inauguration du pavillon républicain dans le port de Constantinople', 28 June 1794, MAE, CP Turquie 188, fol. 216; 'Verbal de la fête célébrée le tridi 23 Thermidor l'an 2', MAE, CP Turquie 188, fols. 423–4.

not to that of its government; in 1794 we also find toasts to the National Convention and the Committee of Public Safety. Thus, also the lists of toasts can be interpreted as an example of the fundamentally didactic character of French revolutionary festivals.

The assumption that after 1794 the French were less sensitive with regard to possibly irritating the Ottoman authorities is supported by another fact: on 21 January 1794, the French community abstained from celebrating the anniversary of the execution of Louis XVI.⁵⁵ On 21 January 1795, however, Istanbul gave a special proof of its singularity as a city where European royalists and republicans lived closely together, obliged to tolerate each other by the authority of their Ottoman hosts. That day, the French royalists gathered for a memorial service at the house of their representative, with officers from the embassies of Austria, Spain, and Naples joining them to 'mix their tears with those which we [the French royalists] have shed at the tomb of the virtuous Louis XVI, our good king'.⁵⁶ At the same time, the French republicans celebrated the day with a civic banquet at the embassy and—a special provocation to their enemies—a ball at the French inn 'where they danced all night'.⁵⁷ The peculiarity of this day in the Ottoman capital was lost on neither the enemies nor the friends of the Revolution:

Duodi last, a great day for republicans! I can assure you, citizen, we celebrated in a manner which is most worthy of this great occasion . . . We were about 200. There was a general dinner⁵⁸ at the palace, and in the evening a ball . . . , which was open to all French, at an inn which has a room for this purpose. Pera offered on this occasion one of those bizarre contrasts which the theatre of the world still presents but too often: catafalques, offices for the dead, etc., celebrated in the Catholic churches, were the shadows of our festival.⁵⁹

⁵⁵ Only the partisans of Hénin did so. See Ainslie to Grenville, 25 January 1794, TNA, FO 78/15, fol. 16.

⁵⁶ Chalgrin to Flachslanden, 24 January 1795, HHStA, Türkei II, 109, January–March, fol. 66.

⁵⁷ Ibid., fols. 66, 68.

⁵⁸ In the eighteenth century, dinner was usually taken in the afternoon.

⁵⁹ Descorches to Commissaire of External Relations, 24 January 1795, MAE, CP Turquie 190, fol. 131.

Probably the main difference between the festivals in France and those in the Ottoman Empire was the latter's seclusion.⁶⁰ In France, the festivals aimed at publicity and display, with a strong emphasis on visual aspects; but the great majority of the celebrations in Istanbul resembled private parties, hidden away from the public of the Ottoman capital, and for which the participants often had to sign up in advance.⁶¹ Characteristic of all revolutionary festivals in Istanbul was the French administrators' attempt to regulate practically every detail. This aspect is omnipresent in the sources. The explanation for such strict regulation was the need to avoid any disorder or tumult during the celebrations, for it was feared that if such excesses became public, they would be used by the enemies of the Revolution to lobby the Ottoman government for retributions against the French community. Among the participants of the celebration, order was normally maintained by a president of the society. If the festivity became too boisterous, the principals of the community would intervene to maintain order and decorum.⁶²

The French administration imposed a number of restrictions designed to prevent the revolutionary festivals from causing any sensation in the city. For example, no Ottoman subjects were allowed to join the festivities, in order not to raise any suspicions that the French were trying to incite the local population against their rulers. It was often agreed that the participants should not leave the festivals in large groups, but rather one by one.⁶³ Also, the festivals normally ended before six o'clock in the evening.⁶⁴ The banquet of 20 September 1793 is a good example of the strict regulation of the celebrations. Order among the participants of the celebration was maintained by a president of the society. In the invitation, the organizers expressed their regret that they were not able to celebrate the festival in the embassy building, but the French envoy had made clear that the decisions of the Sublime Porte had to be respected:

[You] will without any doubt also sense the need to celebrate such a great day more brilliantly; but the yoke of circumstances that constrains us is beyond our power; you all feel it: experience has taught us that there is not, for the moment, any other possible way of expressing our joy.⁶⁵

Speeches, toasts, and songs took place in a closely controlled order and 'any individual act was prohibited'.⁶⁶ Nevertheless, at least according to the official record, the festival encouraged a sense of union among the citizens taking part. The

⁶⁰ This was also the case for revolutionary celebrations in Tunis. See Windler, *La Diplomatie comme expérience de l'autre*, 197.

⁶¹ On the emphasis on the visual in French revolutionary festivals, see Ozouf, *Festivals and the French Revolution*, 205–12.

⁶² Maret to Herbert, 19 February 1794, HHStA, Türkei II, 106, January–March, fol. 275.

⁶³ 'Procès-verbaux de la célébration du quatorze juillet à Constantinople', MAE, CP Turquie 185, fol. 75.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, fol. 76.

⁶⁵ Invitation to the festival for the Inauguration of the Republic, 11 September 1793, MAE, CP Turquie 185, fol. 357.

⁶⁶ 'Relation de la fête de la République une et indivisible, célébré le 20 septembre 1793 à Constantinople', MAE, CP Turquie 185, fol. 421.

reports on the festivals certainly played down the conflicts and frictions between the participants and described an idealized picture of republican harmony:

[Everyone] gave his neighbour the kiss of union, the French nation became from now on but a great family . . . Then one could hear the cheering of long live liberty and equality, long live the Republic one and indivisible, long live the National Convention; afterwards we withdrew peacefully, and everybody was pleased with the bliss of this day.⁶⁷

The solemn tone of these reports was also due to the fact that they served propagandistic purposes—some of them were printed and distributed for the edification of the members of the French community in Istanbul, or to give an example to the other communities in the Levant.

In fact, many of the revolutionary festivals were anything but harmonious. The clashes in front of the Austrian embassy on the day of the inauguration of the new tricolour flag (Chapter 7) and the brawl between the partisans of Hénin and Descorches at the French embassy, on 14 July 1794 (Chapter 8), have already been described. The schism among the French republicans broke out at the revolutionary festival on 10 August 1793, when the partisans of Hénin refused to celebrate in the French inn and insisted on moving the civic banquet to the French embassy, despite the Sublime Porte's prohibition.⁶⁸ Before that day, the division among the French had not been so apparent. The festivity, in which all citizens were meant to take part, made it clear that the republican community was split into two factions. The schism was felt all the more bitterly, and was universally lamented, because the staging of unity among republicans, the practice of equality and fraternity, was the very essence and *raison d'être* of the republican festivals. This is also reflected by the message sent from Descorches and his supporters, in the French inn, to the faction of Hénin, waiting in the embassy:

Your brothers, afflicted by the separation with which they are menaced—and which will make this day that could be so happy a day of mourning for them and for the country [*patrie*], suffering from this division—have come to remind their brothers . . . of the republican union, which we all have sworn.⁶⁹

Nevertheless, Hénin and his supporters did not join the partisans of Descorches. They held a separate banquet and constituted their political club. The division among the French republicans continued, as we have seen, until the recall of Descorches and Hénin.

One of the reasons why Hénin's faction refused to attend the banquet at the French inn was to protest against the administration of the French envoy, who was accused of upholding and supporting the merchants' aristocracy in Istanbul.⁷⁰ A few weeks later, the French envoy refused to summon a general assembly to deliberate on the programme for the celebration on 20 September 1793. This decision conflicted with his earlier policy to use the organizing of the revolutionary

⁶⁷ Ibid., fol. 422.

⁶⁸ 'Relation de la célébration du 10 Août, à Constantinople', MAE, CP Turquie 185, fol. 228. See also Chapter 7.

⁶⁹ Ibid., fol. 230.

⁷⁰ Ibid., fol. 235.

festivals as a practising ground for democratic participation. Descorches justified his refusal by stating that he did not want to give his ultra-republican opponents a platform for agitation, which would damage both the cohesion of the community and the authority of the administration.⁷¹ For the members of the Club of Constantinople, however, this was another proof of the French envoy's deeply anti-republican attitude: 'Such conduct . . . suggests that despotism is the basis of action of this official . . . [He] is opposed to the free exercise of human rights . . .'⁷²

The denunciations referring to revolutionary festivals continued in 1794. In this context, the close connections between political currents in France and in the Levant are evident. On 16 July 1794, shortly before 9 Thermidor (27 July), a member of the Committee of Public Safety in Paris, Barère, reported to the National Convention that, unusually, many 'pretended fraternal banquets' were celebrated in the French capital. Barère criticized these festivities as being part of a counter-revolutionary intrigue, being too turbulent, unregulated, and giving rise to immorality. Furthermore, too much food was squandered in a time of need. All festivities that had not been ordered by the National Convention were therefore suspect: 'Civic banquets are a present from the aristocracy, and their presents are poisoned.'⁷³ Six weeks later, apparently after having read Barère's report in the newspaper, Joseph Noyane, the unruly republican of Izmir, denounced Descorches (in spite of the very different circumstances in Paris and Istanbul), arguing that Descorches was using civic banquets—or orgies, as he put it—as a means of intrigue: 'It is by such means and by the profusion of punch and the lowest flatteries that this former courtier has managed to mislead the majority of the citizens of Constantinople.'⁷⁴

The accusations of being a courtly intriguer or of displaying aristocratic behaviour were a great danger to a French official who was a former marquis and who had begun his career under the *ancien régime*. The revolutionary festivals were important occasions, therefore, at which the French envoy could present himself as a true republican by emphasizing his egalitarian comportment. The 'Austrian spy' Maret commented ironically:

We went that evening to a ball given by [Proconsul] Pech, where Citizen Descorches opened the dance with the *citoyenne proconsulesse* [*sic*], who, after two bows, allowed herself to be kissed to the great satisfaction of all the *sans-culottes*. The ball was very brisk and very lively; the minister was most attentive to the wives of bakers, cobblers, wigmakers, tailors etc. pretending he would rather dance with them, than with those women who had more *culotte*.⁷⁵

⁷¹ Descorches to Foreign Minister, 10 September 1793, MAE, CP Turquie 185, fols. 348–9.

⁷² Club of Constantinople to National Convention, 12 September 1793, MAE, CP Turquie 185, fol. 365.

⁷³ 'Convention nationale. Séance du 28 messidor', *Moniteur universel*, No. 299, 17 July 1794.

⁷⁴ Noyane to Committee of Public Safety, 2 September 1794, MAE, CP Turquie 188, fol. 542.

⁷⁵ Maret to Herbert, 19 February 1794, HHStA, Türkei II, 106, January–March, fol. 275. Maret plays here with the double meaning of the term *sans-culotte*.

CELEBRATING THE DÉCADI

In October 1793, the French Republic introduced a new calendar. Changing the way time was measured was, like the introduction of the metric system, one of the many rationalization processes initiated by the revolutionary government. According to the new republican calendar, the week of seven days was replaced by a week of ten days, the so-called *décade*. The tenth day, the *décadi*, replaced Sunday as the day of rest. It did not take long before the day of rest also became a day of celebration in France.⁷⁶ Bit by bit, the *fête décadaire* developed out of 'improvised liturgical fragments', cultic, and festive elements.⁷⁷ The obligatory public lecture of laws and decrees, decreed in December 1793, was the 'core and the pretext for the civic ceremony'.⁷⁸ In the spring of 1794, Robespierre prompted the introduction of the republican cult of the Supreme Being, a deistic cult combining religion and patriotism.⁷⁹ Part and parcel of this cult were regular celebrations every *décadi*. The decree of the National Convention that instituted the *fêtes décadaires* was enacted on 7 May 1794, declaring in its first article: 'The French people recognizes the existence of the Supreme Being and the immortality of the soul.' The decree furthermore stipulated the introduction of celebrations 'to remind man of the idea of divinity and of the dignity of its existence' (Article IV). As every day in the Catholic calendar is dedicated to a different Saint, so every *décadi* was dedicated to a virtue, a value, or the like. For example, one *décadi* was dedicated to the Republic, one to truth, one to friendship, and four subsequent *décadis* to love, to conjugal love, to paternal love, and to maternal tenderness (Article VII). Moreover, the National Convention called on 'all talents, worthy of serving the cause of humanity, . . . to supply hymns and civic songs, and other elements that could contribute to the embellishment and utility [of the celebrations]' (Article IX).⁸⁰

The French community in Istanbul started celebrating the *décadi* on 9 May 1794 and thus before the decree of the National Convention reached the expatriates.⁸¹ The first *fêtes décadaires* seem to have been similar to the other revolutionary festivals studied above. One of these celebrations took place in the house and garden of the provisional chancellor Fleurat, in the near village of St Dimitri (today the Feriköy neighbourhood of Istanbul). The 'Austrian spy' Maret wrote an account of this celebration, because, in spite of the promises of their envoy, the French had invited an Ottoman of unusually short stature to the festival as their special guest (or rather as a party attraction):

⁷⁶ Nevertheless, the replacement of Sunday was contested in most of rural France. See Peter McPhee, *Living the French Revolution, 1789–99* (Basingstoke, 2006), 132.

⁷⁷ Michel Vovelle, *La Révolution contre l'église. De la Raison à l'Être suprême* (Brussels, 1988), 180. On the celebration of the *décadi* in France, see also Schröer, *Republik im Experiment*, 446–61.

⁷⁸ Albert Mathiez, *La Théophilanthropie et le culte décadaire, 1796–1801. Essai sur l'histoire religieuse de la Révolution* (Paris, 1903), 25.

⁷⁹ The Cult of the Supreme Being was Robespierre's answer to the atheist Cult of Reason, whose main champions (members of the Hébertist faction) he had executed. For a masterly description of Robespierre's Festival of the Supreme Being, see Ozouf, *Festivals and the French Revolution*, 106–18.

⁸⁰ 'Convention nationale. Séance du 18 floréal', *Moniteur universel*, No. 229, 8 May 1794.

⁸¹ Descorches to Foreign Minister, 23 May 1794, MAE, CP Turquie 188, fols. 21–2.

What was most extraordinary at the dinner of the last *décade*, which took place at Fleurat's house in St Dimitri, was that under the four eyes of Descorches—the darling, the spoiled child of the Porte—we made a Turk drink wine, who, although grown up, was so small that we had to lift him onto the table, where he danced the carmagnole and made the usual toasts to the Republic, to liberty, to the execration of all tyrants, and one moment later to the prosperity of Sultan Selim, the declared friend of the sans-culottes; . . . after the meal, we went into the garden, to dance a general carmagnole under the national flag, floating in the air; in the middle [of the dance] they placed the jacobinized Turk on the shoulders of whom is not important, because he is as thick as he is tall, especially when he has drunk; they made him hold a hat, decorated with the cockade, which he hoisted on a stick; they explained to him in Turkish what they made him say in bad French; so if the Porte allows such scenes to multiply, I have no doubt that soon the Grand Seigneur will be without a throne and without breeches [*sans culottes*]. The Jacobin spirit made great progress among the people, and the sooner Sultan Selim chases off the rebels the better for him, if he wants to keep his head on his shoulders.⁸²

A boisterous garden party such as this, featuring a 'tiny' drunken Turk, was certainly not the kind of solemn celebration Robespierre had in mind when conceiving his *fête décadaire*. However, it did not take long until the gatherings developed into a much more formal festivity. The announcement with which Descorches signalled the introduction of the *décadi* celebrations to his superior gives a very different impression from the frivolous scenes described by Maret:

We have started to solemnize the *décadis* with a fraternal meeting. There are very few of our *concitoyens* who are not eager to participate. So far we have had two [*décadi*-celebrations] . . . The presence of a large number of sisters has increased their pleasantness. For such days, I would like to introduce the practice of a public communication of laws, decrees, and other transactions affecting all citizens, which would be followed by a speech on republican morals, delivered by those citizens who feel inspired by their zeal. It seems to me that a celebration of this kind could only very advantageously affect the formation of the manners which suit us—those virtuous manners, which will be our strength and our happiness.⁸³

There is a consensus among eminent historians, such as Alphonse Aulard, Albert Mathiez, Mona Ozouf, and Michel Vovelle, that the cult of the Supreme Being—a creation of Robespierre's—faded out in France after 9 Thermidor.⁸⁴ To quote Mathiez: 'With Robespierre fell the Terror, and with the Terror the cult of the Supreme Being.'⁸⁵ Under Robespierre, the celebration of *décadi* had never received a uniform official liturgy, although the decree of 7 May 1794, instituting the *fête décadaire*, had charged the Committee of Public

⁸² Maret to Herbert, 21 May 1794, HHStA, Türkei II, 106, April–May, fols. 256–7.

⁸³ Descorches to Foreign Minister, 23 May 1794, MAE, CP Turquie 188, fols. 21–2.

⁸⁴ François-Alphonse Aulard, *Le Culte de la Raison et le culte de l'Être Suprême, 1793–1794* (Paris, 1892), 367–8; Mathiez, *La Théophilanthropie et le culte décadaire, 1796–1801*, 18; Mona Ozouf, 'Religion révolutionnaire', in François Furet and Mona Ozouf (eds.), *Dictionnaire critique de la Révolution française* (Paris, 1988), 603–13, 610; Vovelle, *La Révolution contre l'église*, 186–8.

⁸⁵ Mathiez, *La Théophilanthropie et le culte décadaire, 1796–1801*, 18.

Safety and the Committee of Instruction with presenting a plan for the organization of these festivities (Article VIII).⁸⁶ Repeatedly, after 9 Thermidor, the National Convention attempted in vain to complete this task.⁸⁷

In Istanbul, however, the civic worship of the Supreme Being and the solemn celebration of the *décadi* had quite a vivid afterlife during the Thermidorian period. On 5 October 1794, shortly after the beginning of the republican year three, the French legation printed a circular, in which the envoy announced a formalized plan for the *célébration décadaire*, which was to take place at the French embassy. This document is another excellent example of the didactic character of French revolutionary culture. Descorches declared that after having won liberty, equality, and fraternity, it was now time to develop republican virtues to maintain the achievements of the Revolution:

What we need now are *virtues*, to render the benefits [of the Revolution] unchangeable and to retrieve from them the greatest amount of happiness which man can enjoy in society . . . But, . . . let us not deceive ourselves, we would fall far short of this, if we confined ourselves to conforming only our dress and our language; it is especially necessary that [republican virtues] enter our manners, our customs, and particularly our sentiments; it is necessary that French republicans command respect even from those who believe they do not have to love them. These are the goals which make us admire and applaud the sublime institution of the *fêtes décadaires* as soon as it came to our knowledge . . .⁸⁸

The French envoy declared furthermore that he had drawn up a plan to ‘improve the way in which we have hitherto celebrated here the *décadis* and to fulfil more exactly the spirit of the law’.⁸⁹ The result of this rearrangement featured democratic procedures and a remarkable number of parallels to a Sunday mass. It was not unusual for French revolutionaries to integrate elements of Catholic liturgy—featuring new symbolic content—into their rituals.⁹⁰ Descorches’s plan stipulated that the *fête décadaire* was exclusively dedicated to ‘nourish in our hearts the seeds of virtue, to cultivate our republican morale’. All citizens were invited explicitly to come to the gatherings with their families.⁹¹ The ringing of the embassy’s bell would remind them of the hour of the ceremony, every *décadi* at nine o’clock in the morning. A commission of citizens, which included a *commissaire-président* and a *commissaire-orateur*, prepared the *fête*. The commission was elected by the participants of the gatherings. The ceremony began with a hymn to the Supreme Being, sung by some *citoyennes* or *citoyens* who had been designated by the *commissaire-président*. Only the refrain was sung by the whole community. After the hymn came the first lesson: the president or another citizen read, in turn, one *décadi* the Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen,

⁸⁶ ‘Convention nationale. Séance du 18 floréal’, *Moniteur universel*, No. 229, 8 May 1794.

⁸⁷ Mathiez, *La Théophilanthropie et le culte décadaire, 1796–1801*, 25–8. As an object of government policy, the *fêtes décadaires* witnessed a brief revival only under the French Directory, in 1796.

⁸⁸ Circular letter concerning the organization of the *reunions décadaires*, 5 October 1794, MAE, CP Turquie 189, fol. 53. Emphasis in original.

⁸⁹ Ibid. ⁹⁰ Stollberg-Rillinger, *Rituale*, 126–7.

⁹¹ Circular letter concerning the organization of the *reunions décadaires*, 5 October 1794, MAE, CP Turquie 189, fols. 53–4.

the next *décadi* the Constitution of 1793, and every third *décadi* the report on the institution of the *fêtes nationales et décadaires*.⁹² Then followed the sermon:

After this lecture, the *commissaire-orateur* delivered a speech on morals which he had prepared in accordance with the consecration of the day [i.e. relating to the virtue to which this day was dedicated] and which was to be read beforehand, in an assembly of commissaires, which the chief official of the Republic also attended, in order to make such corrections as were deemed suitable.⁹³

After the sermon, the chancellor of the legation read out announcements, births, deaths, and marriages as well as the fortnightly news bulletin (see Chapter 6). Finally, another commissaire read an account of civic and heroic actions of French republicans (or revolutionary pamphlets and treatises). Towards the end, a collection was made for the *bureau de charité fraternelle*.⁹⁴ The ceremony ended with a hymn to liberty, sung in the same manner as the opening hymn. Since revolutionary hymns were rare in Istanbul, the writing of lyrics for these songs became a field of creative activity for a Citizen Paris, who authored a number of the hymns sung at the celebrations in Istanbul.⁹⁵

Descorches's plan was largely put into practice, as can be seen from a series of minutes for six consecutive *réunions décadaires*, between 29 January and 20 March 1795, which survived in the archives of the French embassy. Nevertheless, the participants also voted on modifications to the ceremonial. For example, in February 1795, one citizen objected that the whole report on the institution of the *fête décadaire* was too long to read aloud. He moved to read only half the text in the present session and the other half the next *décadi*. The assembly adopted this suggestion.⁹⁶ Two *décadis* later, the assembly replaced the entire text by a more recent address of the National Convention to the French people, following the suggestion of a citizen who spoke out against the length of the report and the problematic personality of its author (Robespierre).⁹⁷ It also became customary for

⁹² This was the famous speech given by Robespierre, on 7 May 1794 (18 Floréal II), after which the National Convention decreed the institution of the *fête décadaire*. It is quite remarkable that, even after 9 Thermidor, this speech was given the same rank as the Constitution and the Declaration of Rights—albeit not for long (see later).

⁹³ Circular letter concerning the organization of the *réunions décadaires*, 5 October 1794, MAE, CP Turquie 189, fol. 53.

⁹⁴ The *bureau de charité fraternelle* developed out of a poor relief fund which had been administered by the deputies of the *nation*. In early 1794, the French envoy prompted a reorganization of the poor relief system along republican lines. Henceforth, a commission was in charge of distributing funds, in accordance with a fixed set of rules of procedure. See Descorches to Foreign Minister, 14 January 1794, HHStA, Türkei II, 106, April–May, fol. 195 (Letter intercepted by the Austrians); MAE, CP Turquie 186, fol. 510 (duplicate). For more documents on the *bureau de charité fraternelle*, showing that this institution continued to exist unchanged under Descorches's successors Verninac and Aubert-Dubayet, see CADN, Constantinople, Ambassade, Série B3.

⁹⁵ We have already come across Citizen Paris as the author of a report suggesting the establishment of a republican guard of honour for the French legation in Istanbul.

⁹⁶ Minutes of the *réunion décadaire* of 10 ventôse 3 (28 February 1795), CADN, Constantinople, Ambassade, Série B3, unfoliated.

⁹⁷ Minutes of the *réunion décadaire* of 30 ventôse 3 (20 March 1795), CADN, Constantinople, Ambassade, Série B3, unfoliated.

the minutes of the previous gathering to be read out at the beginning, right after the hymn to the Supreme Being. In addition, a third hymn was introduced, between the sermon and the reading of the news bulletin.⁹⁸ A motion to allow all citizens to decide for themselves whether they wanted to sit or stand during the hymn to the Supreme Being was apparently rejected, however, from which it can be deduced that people were expected to stand during the hymn. A query as to whether hats had to be taken off during the hymn to liberty was left unanswered.⁹⁹ The French envoy was satisfied with the rearrangement of the *décadi* gatherings: '[Finally,] republican manners are advancing markedly among us. Our *fêtes décadaires* have been up to now a success that even surpassed my hopes.'¹⁰⁰

Descorches, it seems, was quite keen on his new instrument for the 'regeneration' of his compatriots in the Levant. If the French royalist representative Chalgrin can be believed, the French envoy had even tried in vain to obtain the official permission of the Sublime Porte to build temples for the cult of the Supreme Being in the Ottoman Empire.¹⁰¹ Chalgrin confirmed Descorches's opinion that the *réunions décadaires* were a success, commenting that the hall of the embassy was too small for the assembly. Furthermore, he also observed the transformation of the *fête décadaire* from a more festival-like celebration to a solemn ceremony:

This is the way in which the [Jacobin horde] celebrated today the day of the *décade*: before, they had gathered at the inn of Menard to solemnize the day in drunkenness and debauchery. Since a few weeks ago, they have started celebrating more soberly; but, on the other hand, in the most impious manner. These brigands get together in one of the halls of the palace of the ambassador of the king [i.e. the French embassy], to where the bell, ringing for an entire hour, calls them. In the back of the room, a lectern on wheels has been installed. This is where the sacrilegious orator . . . is placed. There, he vomits all the usual Jacobin blasphemies against the church, sovereigns, monarchical governments, and everything that does not belong to this abominable sect. Last *décade* it was Descorches himself who distilled the poison of his dangerous maxims. Once this impious declamation is over, one of the women or girls admitted to this culpable assembly intones one of the filthy songs of the Revolution, [which then is] repeated with dreadful howling by these scoundrels, piled up one upon the other, in this room which is too small to hold them all. Then they catechize the children, whom Descorches requires the parents to bring along for this purpose, because this infamous official pretends that this is the only means to bring about the regeneration of the human species in France and in all parts of the world where his detestable religion is not practised.¹⁰²

⁹⁸ See e.g. the minutes of the *réunion décadaire* of 30 pluviôse 3 (18 February 1795), CADN, Constantinople, Ambassade, Série B3, unfoliated.

⁹⁹ Both in the minutes of the *réunion décadaire* of 10 pluviôse 3 (29 January 1795), CADN, Constantinople, Ambassade, Série B3, unfoliated.

¹⁰⁰ Descorches to Commissaire of External Relations, 9 November 1794, MAE, CP Turquie 189, fol. 222.

¹⁰¹ Chalgrin to Flachslanden, 24 December 1794, HHStA, Türkei II, 108, fols. 383–4.

¹⁰² Chalgrin to Flachslanden, 25 November 1794, HHStA, Türkei II, 108, fols. 249–50.

As could be expected, the representatives of the anti-French Coalition tried to convince the Sublime Porte of the necessity to prevent the propagation of 'atheism' on Ottoman territory and therefore to prohibit the *décadi* celebrations. However, the Ottoman government's reaction, too, was predictable, as the French envoy reported: '[Justice] will be served to everyone: by letting them talk and by letting us do.'¹⁰³ The French envoy took care to retain the goodwill of his hosts by continuing his policy of excluding Ottoman subjects from the revolutionary festivities: 'As for the foreigners, . . . several have expressed to me their desire to attend these *fêtes civiles*, but I was and will continue to be scrupulous in observing the rule we have imposed on ourselves, to admit neither Ottoman nor Raya [i.e. non-Muslim Ottoman subjects].'¹⁰⁴

Descorches saw the attendance at his *fêtes décadales* as an indicator or, in his words, a 'thermometer' of the progress of revolutionary principles among the French residents of Istanbul. It was also the indicator of success for his policy of propaganda and indulgence towards all those members of the French community who had not as yet become convinced of the republican cause, a policy that applied also to the *décadi* celebrations themselves. The members of the French community were not obliged to attend the republican 'service', just as they were not prevented from going to church. Persuasiveness and peer pressure sufficed for the success of the French envoy's gatherings, at least if his own accounts are reliable:

There are very few citizens who do not regularly come to these assemblies and who appear not to be attracted by the benefit and satisfaction they find there. This is not quite the same for the women. We deplore their errors or rather their weakness, because [they do not come to our assemblies, in order] not to displease some elderly relatives or some priests who dominate them. But since we believe that one can only heal sick minds though indulgent reason, . . . we even avoid any reproaches.¹⁰⁵

The French envoy's enthusiasm for the celebration of *fêtes décadales* notwithstanding, Descorches's 'republican mass' remained a short-lived experiment. I found no evidence that his successor Verninac continued these celebrations for long. The regular gatherings probably ended shortly after the first republican envoy's departure from Istanbul. Nevertheless, they must have played an important role in acquainting the French expatriate community of Istanbul with the political culture of the French Revolution.

CONCLUSION

As this chapter has shown, the propagation of French revolutionary political culture massively influenced the French communities of the Levant. If we agree with cultural historians such as Lynn Hunt, that 'the Revolution was, in essence, the

¹⁰³ Descorches to Commissaire of External Relations, 17 February 1795, MAE, CP Turquie 190, fol. 209.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid.

multiplication and diffusion of culture and power',¹⁰⁶ then it is clear with how much justification we can conceptualize the regime change in the French expatriate communities in the Ottoman Empire as a part of the greater process of the French Revolution. The replacement of the symbols of the old regime by those of the new followed the examples of the French motherland, just as the revolutionary festivals and the *fête décadaire* did. As in France, revolutionary festivities were used to symbolically strengthen the relationship between the French Republic and its citizens. All the structural elements of these celebrations came from France, such as the public oath of allegiance, the civic meal, and the dance around the tree of liberty. Other aspects, however, such as the exclusion of women and the avoidance of any public sensation, were responses to the specific political condition of the French in the Levant. The way in which the *décadi* was celebrated in Istanbul in the Thermidorian period was a quite autochthonous creation, as were the hymns of Citizen Paris.

The revolutionary process did not consist solely of spectacular events such as the storming of palaces, the plundering of food stores, or the lynching of aristocrats. Arguably, the more important aspects of the implementation and legitimization of the new regime lay in the conquest of the ordinary:

[T]he power of the revolutionary state . . . expanded at every level as people of various stations invented and learned new political 'microtechniques'. Taking minutes, sitting in a club meeting, reading a republican poem, wearing a cockade, sewing a banner, singing a song, filling out a form, making a patriotic donation, electing an official—all these actions converged to produce a republican citizenry and a legitimate government. In the context of revolution, these ordinary activities became invested with extraordinary significance.¹⁰⁷

These phenomena, the role of revolutionary expansion into everyday life and its practices, can be studied also in the relatively quiet French expatriate communities of the Levant. Power and culture are inseparably linked, as becomes especially obvious, when, as in the case of the French communities, the coercive aspect of power is hampered. Propaganda, symbols, rituals, and other 'microtechniques' of power became of utmost importance for the success of the cause of the new regime; and they demonstrated their leverage in a very impressive way in the specific context of the Levant. It was not the fear of the guillotine that turned the French expatriates into citizens, but the belief in the long-term principles of the French Revolution and a good deal of social pressure.

¹⁰⁶ Hunt, *Politics, Culture, and Class in the French Revolution*, 188.

¹⁰⁷ Hunt, *Politics, Culture, and Class in the French Revolution*, 72.

Conclusion

The French Revolution on Silent Feet

From a superficial point of view, this study has just shown that after years of diplomatic activity, alliance negotiations between revolutionary France and the Ottoman state ended up in a cul-de-sac. The emergence of the new French revolutionary political culture in the Ottoman Empire encompassed only a few hundred French residents, as well as a small number of sympathizers. It did not give rise to a revolutionary mass movement in the Ottoman Empire, at least not in that decade—and clearly it was not intended to do so.¹

Why, then, is it worthwhile to study these margins of French revolutionary history? Mainly because, if put in context, they are not at all marginal. This study may offer only a little sound and fury. Yet, there is a great deal of significance to its findings. The Ottoman Empire was the most important neutral European power in the War of the First Coalition (1792–7). Policymakers of the revolutionary French Republic considered it a pivotal goal to conclude an alliance with the Ottoman sultan, with a particular view to opening up a second front against Habsburg Austria. The ensuing alliance negotiations were in the end unsuccessful, because the negotiating parties differed considerably in what they hoped to gain from such a treaty. The Sublime Porte was reluctant to enter into serious negotiations, particularly in 1793, because it was not at all certain that the French revolutionary government would survive for long. Later, the great concern was to conclude an alliance that would secure the Ottoman Empire in case of an enemy attack, but which would not in itself give rise to a military confrontation with the numerous enemies of France. After having lost nearly every war of the eighteenth century, the Ottoman Empire under Selim III pursued a policy of fiscal, administrative, and military consolidation. Bellicose adventures were therefore unwelcome, at least for the moment. The Sublime Porte was not indifferent to, or passive in, European diplomacy. Especially under Selim III, it followed a strategy of stronger integration into European power politics. The establishment of permanent embassies in other capitals, from 1793 onwards, is probably the best-known example of this policy. Less prominent, perhaps, but no less interesting were the repeated efforts of the Ottoman government to mediate a peace conference in the ongoing War of the First Coalition. Istanbul worked actively towards a general peace, because this

¹ On the long-term influence of the political culture of the French Revolution on the Ottoman Empire, see e.g. Bilici, 'La Révolution française dans l'historiographie turque (1789–1927)'.

would facilitate the conclusion of an exclusively defensive alliance with France. Alas, the war continued and a Franco-Ottoman alliance was never ratified. Nevertheless, this episode helps to rectify the picture of an 'exotic' Ottoman government ignorant of and indifferent towards European international relations. Moreover, it shows that the French invasion of Ottoman Egypt in 1798 was not caused by anti-Ottoman intentions, so much as by rivalry with Britain. In fact, French strategists even seemed to believe that they could come to an understanding with the Sublime Porte over the French invasion. They thought they could conquer Egypt and then appease the sultan by paying Egypt's customary tribute to the government in Istanbul. However, Ottoman policy makers were aware of the warning example of India, where the rule of the East India Company became the gateway to British imperialist expansion.²

Turning away from the question of *what* was negotiated towards an analysis of *how* diplomacy between revolutionary France and the Ottoman Empire was conducted, this study has reassessed a number of common assumptions about French revolutionary foreign policy and diplomatic practice, especially during the Terror. French diplomacy did not cease to exist in 1793/94.³ The rather neglected field of Franco-Ottoman negotiations proves this. It shows, furthermore, that the doctrine of 'cannon diplomacy' (that is, the refusal to negotiate with other governments) applied only to enemy states. Bertrand Barère's radical 'principles of revolutionary diplomacy' apparently did not meet with the approval of all members of the Committee of Public Safety, and were most probably never put into practice (at least not in Istanbul). Robespierre, in particular, favoured a much more conventional approach to diplomacy with regard to neutral states—and even the Jacobin Club of Paris supported alliance negotiations between the democratic French Republic and the (in French eyes) 'despotic' Ottoman Empire. Moreover, in order not to hamper such negotiations, French revolutionaries in the Committee of Public Safety and in the Jacobin Club agreed on the necessity to keep 'a low profile' in the Levant. Any action that could be interpreted as tending to destabilize the political order of the Ottoman state (even if this was not actually the case) was to be considered as contrary to the interests of the French Republic. Marisa Linton has rightly revealed the importance of the idea of the *salut public* in French revolutionary ideology, 'to which cause all else must, if necessary, be sacrificed'.⁴ With regard to Franco-Ottoman diplomacy this meant that conventional diplomacy and ideological self-containment did not necessarily imply a rejection of revolutionary ideology, but could on the contrary be interpreted as the strict application of an ideology in which everything was subjected to the well-being of the nation. Hence, anybody who tried to propagate the Revolution among Ottoman subjects was not a good revolutionary, but a traitor to the French republican cause. The common belief that French revolutionaries were 'crusaders' or 'world revolutionaries', therefore, needs to be revised. Although the supporters of the

² Firges, *Großbritannien und das Osmanische Reich Ende des 18. Jahrhunderts*, 35–8.

³ Cf. Palmer, *Twelve Who Ruled*, 59; Stone, *Reinterpreting the French Revolution*, 172.

⁴ Linton, *Choosing Terror*, 285.

French Revolution in the Levant believed that their example would in the long run also 'regenerate' the Ottoman Empire, they were not 'proselytizing'. The manifold reports to the contrary, seeming to prove the subversive machinations of French republicans, all originated from enemy sources. Anti-revolutionary accounts all seem to adhere to the image of French republicanism as a global anarchist movement. However, as the present study has shown, this was clearly not the case.

Among the population of the Ottoman Empire, French revolutionary ideology played a marginal role during the last decade of the eighteenth century. This changed radically during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. In the last years of the Ottoman Empire's existence, the French Revolution became a pivotal *lieu de mémoire* for the Ottoman modernizing movements. When Istanbul witnessed its own revolution in 1908 (the so-called Young Turk Revolution), Adolphe Thiers's *Histoire de la Révolution française* was allegedly the most sought-after item in the bookshops of the Ottoman capital.⁵

In the late eighteenth century, however, French revolutionaries were ready to restrain the propagation of revolutionary ideology for the sake of a strategic alliance with the Ottoman state. The new political culture of the French Revolution introduced itself 'on silent feet', in order not to alienate the Ottoman sultan or the ruling elites. This was true for diplomatic practice, as well as for the internal administration of the autonomous French expatriate communities. When the French envoy's credential letters were rejected because they addressed Ottoman dignitaries in too egalitarian a manner, the French government was ready to retreat from such an innovation. And when a handful of French citizens in Istanbul founded a Jacobin Club, this event was important enough to be publicly denounced by Robespierre himself, from the rostrum of the National Convention.⁶

The Ottoman government, likewise, demonstrated goodwill towards the French republicans. No other monarchy in Europe, except perhaps Denmark, showed itself as tolerant towards the public display of the new French political culture on its territory—the continuous complaints and political pressure of anti-French diplomats notwithstanding. Like the Scandinavian kingdom, the Sublime Porte waited until 1795 before officially recognizing the French Republic, but was undertaking serious negotiations with the French envoy in the meantime.⁷

In his research on French diplomacy in Tunis, Christian Windler argued that French diplomats and local rulers in northern Africa, adhering to different diplomatic traditions, were used to bridging cultural differences in pragmatic ways during their negotiations. French revolutionary innovations in diplomatic practice were, therefore, less difficult to deal with, and produced less scandal, than in Europe.⁸ Pragmatism

⁵ Johannes Lepsius, *Bericht über die Lage des armenischen Volkes in der Türkei* (Potsdam, 1916), 223. I am obliged to Stefan Ihrig for this reference. See also Coller, 'The French Revolution and the Islamic World of the Middle East and North Africa', 130–1.

⁶ Robespierre at the National Convention, 17 November 1793, *Archives parlementaires*, vol. 79, 380.

⁷ Rémusat, 'Un sans-culotte à la cour de Danemark', 542.

⁸ Christian Windler, 'Diplomatic History as a Field for Cultural Analysis: Muslim–Christian Relations in Tunis, 1700–1840', *The Historical Journal*, 44(1) (2001), 79–106, 94; Windler, *La Diplomatie comme expérience de l'autre*, 431–2.

was certainly an important factor in Franco-Ottoman diplomacy, too. However, as the Danish example shows, Ottoman tolerance towards French innovations and French readiness to compromise in diplomatic practice cannot be fully explained by the fact that Ottomans and French adhered to different diplomatic traditions. In the end, it was also political interest that helped to overcome potential ceremonial or representational obstacles to the conduct of diplomacy.

Studying regime change in the French expatriate communities of the Ottoman Empire as a translocal process makes it possible to 'integrate' it into the history of the French Revolution; that is, to conceptualize it as part of the larger French revolutionary process. A striking number of phenomena in these small communities can be related to similar developments in France, such as the destruction and replacement of symbols of the old regime; revolutionary festivals; the celebration of the *décadi*; democratic assemblies; treason, defection and emigration; schisms among the revolutionaries; the destabilization of governmental authority; and the war. The great difference between the French Revolution in France and the French Revolution in the Levantine expatriate communities lay, however, in the limited coercive means available to the French authorities in the Ottoman Empire. In France, the revolutionary government had recourse to force when its authority was threatened—with sometimes terrible consequences. In the French communities of the Ottoman Empire, however, no 'political culture of state violence', to use Timothy Tackett's words, could develop.⁹ The Revolution had to come on silent feet, if it were to come at all. Therefore, even during the Terror in France, when indulgence had become a crime, French authorities in the Levant followed a policy of tolerance and indulgence towards repenting counter-revolutionaries, insubordinate republicans, the Catholic Church, and the politically undecided—all of this with the knowledge and the backing of the revolutionary government in Paris.

Propaganda measures were crucial in winning the French residents in the Levant over to the new regime and in dealing with republican insubordination. The 'tribunal of opinion' developed into a powerful weapon for consolidating the authority of the French administration in the Levant. The French news bulletin was the first periodical newspaper ever produced in the Ottoman Empire. It reported mainly on French victories in the war and other successes of the Republic and was intended to convince both Ottomans and French expatriates of the lasting nature of the regime change in France. Thus, as long as it was translated into the languages of the Ottoman Empire, the bulletin had a twofold function: to influence the Ottoman elites in favour of an alliance with France, and to persuade the French residents to cooperate with the new regime. Another means of turning the French expatriates into republican citizens was the organization of revolutionary festivals. These festivities were a crucial element of French revolutionary political culture. They emulated, in many regards, translocal models from France. Revolutionary celebrations enabled, and indeed required, the participants to reveal their allegiance to the new regime through performative acts. Furthermore, through their

⁹ Tackett, *The Coming of the Terror in the French Revolution*, 342.

didactic character, they educated their participants on how to talk about and how to put into practice the new political culture. Thus, in the Levant, it was the persuasive power of, and the peer pressure created by, the revolutionary political culture, and not the Terror, that stabilized the authority of the new regime. This result puts into perspective the exculpatory claim of older republican historiography that only Terror could save the Revolution from its enemies.

What happened in the Levantine French communities was part of the French revolutionary process. However, in the Levant, the same political culture led to a largely non-violent regime change, which may provide some support to the thesis that the Terror was not a necessary consequence of 1789.¹⁰ The difference between the French revolutionaries in France and those in the Ottoman Empire lay not in their ideology, but in the very different circumstances of the Levant: the small size of the communities; their relative isolation; their social composition; the fact that their very existence depended on the goodwill of the Ottoman authorities; and the French interest in good diplomatic and commercial relations with the Ottoman Empire. All these factors help to explain why French revolutionaries acted in the Levant 'on silent feet', why they chose 'wisdom' over 'force', and why even the French government of the Terror, at the end of 1793, dismissed in the Levant the very policies it supported in France: '[In] the end, because of the difference of circumstances, the most ardent patriots can be wrong in Constantinople, even if they were a thousand times right in Paris.'¹¹

¹⁰ Dan Edelstein makes a similar argument for the American Revolution. Also here a very similar political culture was at work. But, according to Edelstein, in the American case it was the specificity of the juridical system that impeded state-sponsored excesses of political violence. Annie Jourdan argues however, that also in the United States (and elsewhere during revolution), there existed a 'terrorist' temptation'. See Edelstein, 'What Was the Terror?', 466; cf. Jourdan, 'Les Discours de la terreur à l'époque révolutionnaire (1776–1798)', 70–6.

¹¹ 'Rapport sur Descorches, Henin, et l'affaire du citoyen Roubeau', 22 November 1793, MAE, CP Turquie 186, fol. 332. This source was previously quoted in Chapter 8.

Glossary

9 Thermidor: Political coup (on 27 July 1794), during which Robespierre and other leading politicians of the Terror were overthrown.

caftan: Valuable Ottoman court robe.

capitulations: Privileges, granted by the Ottoman sultan, which determined the commercial and legal rights of the different European merchant communities in the Ottoman Empire. In other words, the capitulations constituted the very basis of the legal existence of European trade in the Levant.

chargé d'affaires: Low-level diplomatic representative. Often chargés d'affaires served as a replacement for higher-ranking diplomats (envoys or ambassadors).

Civil Constitution of the Clergy: Law, enacted in summer 1790, through which priests and bishops became elected civil servants, paid by the state.

Committee of Public Safety: Committee of the National Convention, consisting of twelve members. It was created in early 1793 to organize the war effort. It was the control centre of government during the Terror and until the Constitution of the French Directory (October 1795).

Dantonists: Partisans of Georges-Jacques Danton, member of the National Convention. Although a Montagnard, in late 1793 he criticized the Terror. He was therefore denounced as 'indulgent', and was arrested and executed, together with a number of his supporters, in the spring of 1794.

décadi: Tenth day of the French revolutionary week (*décade*), which was meant to replace Sunday as a day of rest.

dragoman: Interpreter who, especially when working for embassies, also had some legal training.

échelle: Ottoman city with European merchant communities.

Feuillantins: Members of the Feuillant Club, which supported the constitutional monarchy.

fleur-de-lis: The fleur-de-lis symbol, a stylized lily, was a symbol of the French monarchy.

Frank: The Ottomans used 'Frank' as a generic term for Roman Catholic and Protestant Europeans who were not subjects of the Ottoman sultan.

Girondins: A republican political group of the French Revolution, named after the Gironde in south-west France, as many Girondin deputies came from this region. They were the driving force behind the declaration of war against Austria, in April 1792. Around this time and until the spring of 1793, they dominated national politics. However, when the Revolution radicalized further, they were overthrown by the Montagnards, at the end of May 1793, and most of their prominent leaders executed.

Grand Signior or Grand Seigneur: The Ottoman sultan.

Hébertists: Partisans of Jacques-René Hébert, to the political left of Robespierre and his partisans. They were persecuted from the spring of 1794 onwards.

Jacobins: Members of the Jacobin Club in Paris. The term is often also used for members of revolutionary political clubs (which were often affiliated with the Paris Jacobins), also for Montagnard partisans, or for French republicans in general.

journée (or *journée révolutionnaire*): refers to days of revolutionary insurrection which often marked a turning point of the French Revolution. Typical examples are 14 July 1789 or 10 August 1792.

kalpak: A traditional Turkic felt cap.

kapudan paşa: Commander of the Ottoman navy.

Levant: The Eastern Mediterranean.

Levantine: Latin Christians, mostly with Genoese and Venetian ancestors, who had become subjects of the Ottoman sultan.

Montagnards: A republican political group of the French Revolution. In the different parliamentary assemblies of the Revolution, they had taken their seats on the highest benches. Hence, they were referred to as the Mountain (*Montagne*). Their most prominent leader was Robespierre. From June 1793 onwards, Robespierre and his Montagnard partisans dominated national politics, drafted the most democratic Constitution of the Revolution, and were responsible for the excesses of the Terror.

nation: In the context of the French expatriate communities in the Ottoman Empire, the term *nation* (in this study always in italics) referred during the *ancien régime* to guild-like privileged corporations of French merchants.

National Convention: Representative assembly, elected in 1792 after the fall of the French monarchy, to write a republican Constitution. It was dissolved in October 1795, after having drawn up the Constitution of the French Directory.

patriots: Term used for supporters of the French Revolution in general.

reis efendi (also *reis ül-küttab*): Ottoman official with similar responsibilities as a foreign minister.

representatives on mission: Members of the National Convention, sent out into the French provinces with almost unlimited powers to fight counter-revolutionaries and to coordinate the war effort.

sans-culottes: Term referring to lower-class urban radical supporters of the French Revolution. Literally, the term means ‘without breeches’, as urban labourers used to wear long trousers, while middle- and upper-class Frenchmen wore breeches.

şeriat court: Tribunal adhering to Islamic law.

Seven Towers Castle: The Seven Towers (*Yediküle*) was a fortress on the city walls of Istanbul. It was an Ottoman tradition to use this castle for the detention of diplomats from countries with which the Ottoman state went to war.

Sublime Porte: The term Sublime Porte (Ottoman Turkish: *Bab-ı Ali*) is a metonym for the Ottoman government.

Terror (or *Terreur*): The Terror (5 September 1793–28 July 1794) was the most violent period of the French Revolution, during which the revolutionary government brutally repressed and intimidated those suspected of being enemies of the Revolution.

Thermidorian Reaction: The period after 9 Thermidor II (27 July 1794) and before the beginning of the rule of the French Directory (2 November 1795).

topçubaşı: Commander of the Ottoman artillery, also responsible for the police in Pera (as the artillery barracks were close by).

tree of liberty: Liberty trees were either real trees or decorated poles (similar to maypoles), planted by supporters of the French Revolution as symbols of their new liberty. They are a symbol of the French Republic to this day, depicted, for example, on French two-Euro coins.

voynoda of Galata: Ottoman official, responsible for governing Galata.

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